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ON THE COVER

While fishing out of Casa Vieja Lodge in Guatemala, Capt. Chris Sheeder caught this beautiful Pacific sailfish in action during one of its spectacular runs.



36

FEATURES

28 Marlin of American Samoa

This might be the next best place in all of the Pacific islands

BY SAM MOSSMAN

36 Paradise in the Perlas Islands

New opportunities await to fish Panama's famed Perlas Islands

BY ANDREW COX



48

42 A Different Kind of Tournament

Casa Vieja Lodge finds an innovative way to help a local school

BY JOHN BROWNLEE

48 Providential Marlin

The Turks and Caicos Islands offer great beaches and food, with world-class marlin fishing

BY BILL BOYCE



DEPARTMENTS

- 6 Editorial
- 8 Off the Deep End
- 14 Letters
- 16 Blue Water Currents
- 18 Conservation
- 20 Tips & Techniques
- 22 Ship's Systems
- 26 Electronics
- 54 Hot Shots
- 56 New Products
- 58 Lines In
- 62 Boats of Interest
- 70 Travel Briefs
- 76 Marlin Marketplace
- 82 Charter Boats/Resorts
- 85 Brokerage
- 106 The Wright Way

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Remembering Packy Offield

The natural world lost a powerful ally in June when Paxson Offield, of Avalon, California, passed away after a battle with leukemia. Offield may not be familiar to most of you, but to those of us involved in the marine conservation world, he was a towering figure. The great-grandson of William Wrigley Jr., the chewing-gum tycoon, Offield spent his life using the considerable means available to him to do good things for the world. Much of that largess focused on billfish and the oceans in general.

I met "Packy," as everyone referred to him, when I joined him on the board of directors of The Billfish Foundation in 2002.



Paxson Offield (1951-2015)

Offield supported the conservation of billfish in countless ways, most notably through the creation of the Offield Center for Billfish Studies, in conjunction with Southern California's Pflieger Institute for Environmental Research. The Center began conducting seminal research on marlin in 2000, and became an important pioneer in the deployment of satellite tags, tagging more than 450 billfish since the program began.

The tagging efforts initially focused primarily on striped marlin but later branched out to include black and blue marlin, tagging fish in Ghana, Madeira, Venezuela, the Dominican Republic, California, Mexico, Panama, Ecuador, Costa Rica, New Zealand and Australia. TBF worked with the Center in 2009

to study Peruvian fisheries alongside local scientists, exploring the waters off Cabo Blanco.

Offield's passion was not limited solely to saving billfish; he generously supported other conservation efforts as well, for a diverse array of species ranging from white seabass to birds of prey. His list of accomplishments is long indeed,

unrivaled in my experience. And he accomplished all of these good deeds with a self-effacing humility and sense of humor that are rare these days. He was a consummate sportsman and gentleman.

In recent years, Offield joined the board of the International Game Fish Association, where he continued his good works as its most recent board

chairman. He was inducted into the IGFA Hall of Fame in 2011, and the IGFA Web page has a great deal of information about his accomplishments and awards, which are too numerous to list here. You can access that by logging on to igfa.org/Museum/HOF-Offield.aspx.

When he learned of Packy's death, Rich Andrews, of Colorado, a longtime friend of Packy's and former TBF board member, said, "What a sad day for literally every living thing on this planet." That sums up Offield's contribution perfectly. His life was a shining example of what can be accomplished with determination, intelligence and a passion for the natural world and the fauna that inhabit it. His was a life we should all try harder to emulate in our own lives.

John Brownlee

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OFF THE DEEP END



Big Fun in Guatemala

All fishing trips aren't great fun. Sometimes you're fishing with someone you don't like. Sometimes the seas are rough and cold, and sometimes the fish never bite — for days on end. If you're one of those guys walking around saying you've never been skunked, then I'm going to tell you that you probably haven't fished very much. Billfishing is never a sure thing. All the best places get slow periods, even when it's supposed to be hot.

Our most recent Marlin University session at Casa Vieja Lodge in Guatemala started out hot, brutally so. With temperatures in the mid-90s and no wind to speak of, our first day on the water felt like being under a broiler for eight hours. We hardly had a chance to notice; the fishing was on fire! On our first day of fishing, May 2, every boat released double-digit numbers of sails.

On this trip, our students experienced a rare treat; we hit one of the best places in the world at its peak. Fishing for four days on four boats, our 16 Marlin University attendees totaled 735 raises, 639 bites and 342 releases. These are the numbers recorded by the lodge captains; I was a journalism major and can't count that high with any sort of reliability, so I'm sticking with them.

One of the stars on that first day, Capt. Chico Alvarenga on *A-Fin-Ity*, had 79 raises, 68 bites and 39 releases! That's a pretty good first day. I think we caught 20 or so on our boat, and I got a big thrill, thanks to our host and lodge owner, Capt. David Salazar. We were fishing on the 42-foot Whiticar *Finest Kind*, and deep into the afternoon,

Salazar went below and asked me if I wanted to drive. Sure.

Well, with the bite like it was, it wasn't long before we got another fish in the spread. The boys downstairs did a great job on the drop-back, and we caught it. I spun around and started heading back to the spot again, and sure enough, a doubleheader pops up and we catch one of the two. I turn back around and get back to the spot, and we catch another one. I have to say, by this point, I'm over the moon, and Salazar is sitting up on the bridge next to me giving me grief on how I'm going to have to buy him some new transmissions if I don't start easing them into gear. I don't have a lot of experience at the helm of a nice convertible sport-fisher, so I sure appreciated the chance to drive such a cool little boat. It went right where I wanted it, too, and made me look a lot better than I am. I was pretty much ecstatic.

On our second day of fishing, three of our boats raised 230 fish, got 210 bites and released 128. With so many bites, it was easy for the boys to relax and get used to seeing a fish behind their bait. The fishing stayed hot for three days before falling off a bit on our final tournament day among the four boats. We got *only* 20 bites on our last day, converting 12, I think, but Jason Brice on *Makaira* caught 19 to seal the victory. Once again, Salazar let me drive the boat at the end of the day, and we caught a doubleheader and another single before I banged a transmission again. It was a blast.

Dave Ferrell

Dave Ferrell
Editor-at-Large

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LETTERS

LOVE AT FIRST BITE

ON JUNE 3, MY GIRLFRIEND, Paula Hill, from Boston Harbor, Washington, and I took a trip to the East Cape, Baja California, in Mexico, to see if she could catch her first striped marlin. Hurricane Blanca was predicted to do a drive-by in about three days, so we only had two days to make this happen. I felt confident it would, since I had my old amigo Victor Garciglia as *el capitán*. Victor picked us up in his old panga named *Mosca*. We made a bait stop around 7:30 a.m., and then Victor put out the spread with his favorite lures. Maybe an hour into the troll, just before the big fan turned on and the Sea of Cortez grew in size, the port



outrigger jumped and the sound of the clicker on the old Penn reel let us know we had a customer. Paula jumped up and grabbed the rod, and set the hook only a couple of times. Then the beautiful billfish put on a show. We put a belt on her, and she caught the fish standing up, all by herself. Victor quickly

grabbed the leader and brought the fish up for a quick picture and a swift release. I think it was love at first bite.

Kelly Corcoran, the lucky boyfriend
Via email

SIGN ME UP

I read the recent Marlin University update with interest ["Costa Rica Heats Up," June/July 2015]. It sounds as if the participants had good weather and experienced some truly excellent fishing. It also sounds like an overall great time, a complete package from start to finish. I've fished Costa Rica many times, and had good days and bad, but usually on my own. Hopefully, Marlin University will add some new venues in the future; I would like to try one out sometime and explore a new place while making new friends.

Edward Provant
Via email

FROM THE MARLIN FACEBOOK PAGE

Karl Anderson's excellent feature on fishing with dredges ["Dredge to Catch," June/July 2015] stimulated some interesting discussions on *Marlin's* Facebook page (facebook.com/marlinmag).

Lavonda and Larry McCandless If you used dynamite that looked like a fish, just think; you could just blow them up and then go back and pick them up. What a sport this is becoming.

Tom DeMoss I guess we are just dinosaurs, Capt. Larry. The days of brining and deboning mullet for trolling baits are long gone. Old school. LOL

Ches Jenkins Life was much simpler back in the 20 years ('80s and '90s) when I was fishing professionally. We caught our fair share using a single split-back mullet teaser. I think dredges should be outlawed in tournaments. That's just my opinion, but since I don't fish anymore, have at it!

Brandon Greenwald Dredges produce!

SOUND OFF! You have three options for submitting your letters to the editor: **[1] EMAIL:** Send email to editor@marlinmag.com. **[2] MAIL:** Write *Marlin* Magazine, Letters, 460 N. Orlando Ave., Suite 200, Winter Park, FL 32789. **[3] FAX:** 407-628-7061. You can also sign up for *Marlin's* newsletter at marlinmag.com/newsletter.



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The Castillo San Felipe del Morro is the iconic backdrop for the IBT at Club Náutico de San Juan, now a 30-pound-test tournament.

tournament.” Visiting anglers wishing to fish the peak of marlin season off Puerto Rico can also take advantage of the rotating boat system the tournament offers, allowing anglers to fish and compete on a different boat every day.



IGFA PARTNERS ON CARIBBEAN BILLFISH PROJECT

The International Game Fish Association will be the lead recreational fishing organization for the Caribbean Billfish Project. The three-year project is a \$1.95 million component implemented by the World Bank and financed by the Global Environment Facility that aims to develop one or more long-term pilot projects for sustainable management and conservation of billfish within the western central Atlantic Ocean. The IGFA will provide scientific advice on measures concerning the conservation and management of billfish resources, including biological, social and economic aspects of billfish fisheries in the Caribbean. IGFA will also establish and serve as the secretariat for the Consortium on Billfish Management and Conservation in the western central Atlantic, which will comprise relevant organizations working together with an agreed work

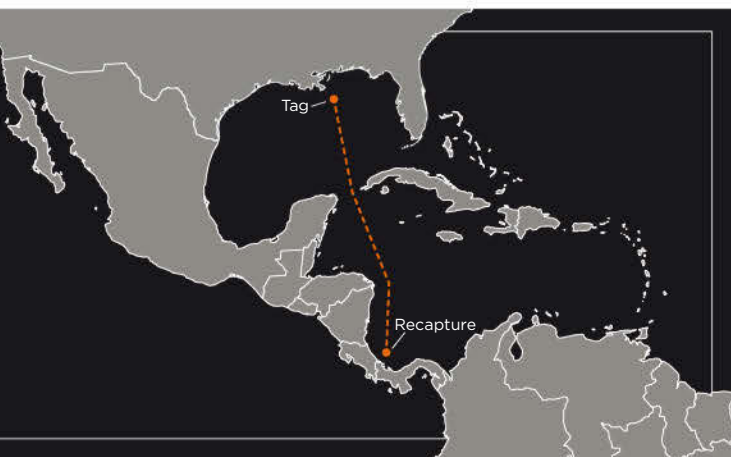
IBT Changes to 30-Pound-Test-Line Fishing Tournament

The International Billfish Tournament of Club Náutico de San Juan, being held Sept. 24-30, is set to become a 30-pound-test event for the first time, providing anglers with increased challenges while setting the bar higher for conservation efforts. “We are

hoping to increase the international angler participation with a change to 30-pound-test line,” says Ricky Jaén, chairman of the 62nd tournament. “Boats will still be allowed to fish with the same group of anglers throughout the tournament, and we will keep innovating ways to offer the best

GULF OF MEXICO BLUE MARLIN RECAPTURE

The Billfish Foundation recently reported a recapture of a blue marlin originally tagged in the Gulf of Mexico and caught along the coast of Costa Rica. The estimated 150-pound blue marlin was caught and tagged off Venice, Louisiana, on July 26, 2014, aboard *Miss Remy* by angler Joy Lobrano, her first-ever blue marlin. More than 1,300 miles from where it was originally tagged, the fish was recaptured 242 days later on March 25, 2015, off Puerto Limon along the Caribbean coast of Costa Rica.



COURTESY SAN JUAN INTERNATIONAL BILLFISH TOURNAMENT / RICHARD GIBSON (TOP), COURTESY AMERICAN SPORTFISHING ASSOCIATION (OPPOSITE)

plan and budget that responds to project needs.

HOUSE PASSES LEGISLATION BENEFITING RECREATIONAL FISHING

On June 2, the U.S. House of Representatives passed H.R. 1335, a bill to reauthorize the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act. "The House action recognizes the increasing popularity of saltwater recreational fishing, which contributes \$70 billion annually to the nation's economy and supports 454,000 jobs in every type of business from marinas, tackle shops and boat dealerships to restaurants, motels and clothing stores," said Jeff Angers, president of the Center for Coastal Conservation. "While H.R. 1335 isn't perfect, it goes a long way toward addressing the priorities of the recreational-fishing community."




Congresswoman Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, R-Fla., met with members of the ASA Government Affairs Committee in Washington.

The House-passed measure reflects many of the recommendations of the Commission on Saltwater Recreational Fisheries Management, also known as the Morris-Deal Commission. "The Morris-Deal Commission described six priorities for the future of saltwater recreational-fisheries management," said Whit Fosburgh, president of the Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership. "The House action advances many of these priorities, and we look forward to continuing to advance the interests of the nation's 11 million saltwater anglers as the Magnuson-Stevens Act reauthorization process continues moving forward in this Congress."

Provisions in H.R. 1335 include promoting a more transparent and science-based review of fishery allocations, helping ensure that important fisheries aren't closed unnecessarily by providing limited exceptions for annual

catch limits, improving the accuracy of fish-stock information through greater involvement by the states, and incorporating data collected by anglers themselves. In addition, Congressional Sportsmen's Caucus co-chair Rep. Rob Wittman, R-Va., added an amendment that gives NOAA Fisheries the authority to implement management practices better tailored to the nature of recreational fishing.

"Rep. Wittman's amendment addresses one of the key priorities

of the Morris-Deal Commission — adopting a revised approach to saltwater recreational-fisheries management," said Mike Nussman, president and CEO of the American Sportfishing Association. "This provision will promote the consideration of management approaches that fit the interests of recreational anglers, as opposed to the current approach of applying a commercial-fisheries management model onto the nation's 11 million anglers." 



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Practice Like You Play

CIRCLE-HOOK REGULATIONS NEED TO CATCH UP WITH THE TIMES

In a famous 2002 interview, now-retired NBA star Allen Iverson responded to criticism that he sometimes skipped practice by saying, “We’re talking about practice. We ain’t talking about the game! We’re talking about practice, man!” That interview came to mind when I tried to rationalize J hook usage outside of billfish tournaments. Why is it that circle hooks are required when fishing in billfish tournaments but not when the majority of anglers are fishing for sailfish, white marlin and blue marlin outside of them? Professional athletes can’t change the shape or size of the ball between games and practices (except maybe Tom Brady), so why is it that we aren’t required to practice like we play when chasing billfish?

Current federal regulations only require circle hooks in tournaments when anglers fish with natural baits, live or dead, or when using combination baits like the Ilander-and-ballyhoo combination. Circle hooks have proven their effectiveness for kite-fishing and dropping back to a charging white marlin, sailfish or blue marlin when trolling. However, J hooks are still

used in many fisheries because they are perceived to be more effective at catching meat species. Not only does the research find otherwise, I’ve personally caught countless mahimahi, tuna and wahoo on circle hooks.

Anglers are only required to use circle hooks during billfish tournaments, but many wish to require them at all times.

The circle-hook regulation was originally implemented in 2007 and finalized in 2008, but many tournaments required anglers to use circle hooks prior to the government mandate, and they are used exclusively in locations with no regulations requiring their use. As the paradigm continues to shift, many individuals in the sport-fishing community would like to see circle hooks required at all times when fishing for billfish using natural or live baits. As we approach the 10-year anniversary of the initial discussions of circle hooks, we owe it to ourselves to look at ways to make the regulations more practical and effective.

NUMBERS TALK

The most formidable study defining the effectiveness of circle hooks for billfish post-release mortality is the Graves and Horodysky study that found white marlin caught on J hooks had a 65 percent post-release survival rate, as compared to a 100 percent survival rate for those caught on circle hooks. Dr. Eric Prince’s study of the live-bait sailfish fishery in South Florida found similar results and determined circle hooks reduced deep hooking — the factor most commonly associated with post-release mortality — twofold, hooking fish in the mouth 98 percent of the time, compared to less than 50 percent with J hooks.

If we look at a hypothetical white marlin season in the mid-Atlantic in which boats fishing with J hooks catch 1,000 fish, 350 of those fish would die, according to the post-release mortality rate garnered by the research. It’s unacceptable as it stands and avoidable with a small regulatory change, so why have we done nothing to curb this trend?

REGIONAL PERSPECTIVES

Members of the Mid-Atlantic Fisheries Management Council, including the chairman, recently sent a letter to NOAA requesting the mandatory use of circle hooks at all times when targeting white marlin, using both dead and live bait. “While most tournament crews in the region use circle hooks throughout the season, some boats are still using small J hooks when targeting white marlin before and after the tournament season, with avoidable, lethal consequences,” says Steve Linhard, a member of MAFMC and the HMS Advisory Panel, in his letter to the agency. “When the current tournament rule was

instituted, anglers successfully adapted to the use of non-offset circle hooks, and most now favor their use in nontournament fishing efforts, representing a cultural acceptance of the method.”

The same could be said for circle versus J hook usage for anglers targeting sailfish in South Florida and the Florida Keys. Joan Vernon, a Billfish Foundation board member and longtime proponent of circle hooks, says, “Although the switch to all circle hooks in the Greater Miami Billfish Tournament was controversial, our anglers adapted quickly and are now enjoying the benefits of their conservation-minded choices. The safe and healthy release of sailfish caught with circle hooks for longer than a decade is one reason for the abundance of that species in South Florida waters.”

FURTHER REFINEMENT

The only resentment toward current circle-hook regulations is their required use with combination baits in tournaments, generally when Ilander-style lures are rigged over ballyhoos. Popular

any more damage or reduction in post-release survival than a lure. One study compares circle hooks to J hooks on combination baits in which anglers dropped baits back to fish for upward of 10 seconds before engaging the drag. This obviously increased the likelihood of deep hooking the fish, but I question the translatability of this finding to how anglers actually fish. It's not my place to contest their results, but rather to show the differences in practice versus theory

to how the regulation currently reads and impacts anglers.

FINAL WORD

It's time that we take a step back, look at the shift in circle-hook practices over the past decade and realize that regulations need to catch up. I'm betting there will be little pushback from the sport-fishing community, but changes to the regulation to make it more practical can be made, and they should be. 🐟



“It's time that we take a step back, look at the shift in circle-hook practices over the past decade and realize that regulations need to catch up.”

in multifish fisheries where anglers are targeting billfish, mahimahi, tuna and wahoo, they are fished more like a traditional lure, with the drag at strike rather than actively dropping back to the fish. As a result, many believe they should not be included in the circle-hook rule or that the language should be modified to reflect actual fishing behavior.

Combination baits can be rigged with a circle hook and a small chugger head on a ballyhoo when pitch-baiting marlin, but this is not where the change is desired. There is a lack of research showing combination baits fished like a lure with the drag at strike causes

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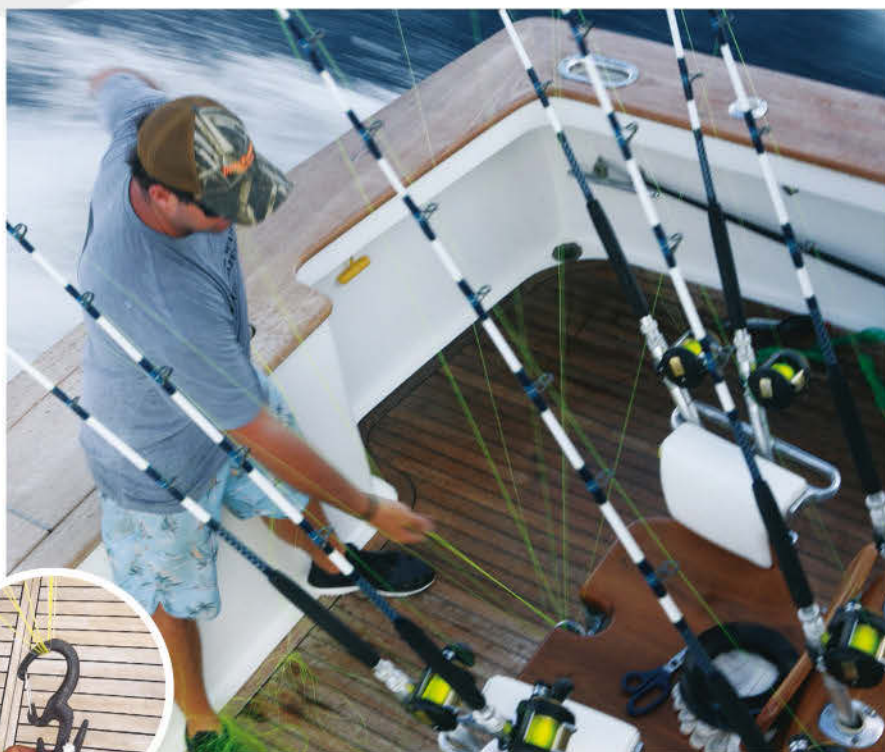


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Tips & Techniques



DO THEM ALL AT ONCE

PUTTING NEW LINE on your reels always starts by taking off the old line. Because you don't have to be as careful with the old line, and to save time, you can run all of the lines from each of your reels through one central location to help you remove it all at once. On *You Never Know*, I attach a dog clip to a tether and tie it off to a cleat on the transom. I then run all the lines through the clip, put the reels in free-spool and dump them all at once. If you want to do this on the run in from fishing, you can forget about the clip and run all the lines through the gimbal on the chair and pull the line off while standing in the

back of the boat. Now, you just need to figure out a way to get eight guys cranking on reels using one spool of line to fill them all up in one shot!

Capt. Stan Blackman
Destin, Florida

READY-MADE BAIT-RIGGING STATION

Rigging baits while on the fishing grounds is an inevitable part of every fishing trip, and on *Booby Trap*, we use this simple bucket system for rigging swordfish baits. For a secure base and working surface, we added a nonslip ring for the bottom of the bucket, as

well as a cutting-board lid that fits on top. Several different manufacturers make these, and you can pick one up at most tackle shops. Next, cut a piece of hose (I prefer polyester-reinforced clear PVC tubing) and through-bolt either end onto the inside rim of the bucket to create a place to stow your knives. By siliconing a piece of plexi-glass on the inside of the bucket, the blades of the knives are protected,



preventing you from getting cut. I also added an old outrigger tip to hold a spool of floss to have handy when rigging, and you can even melt or drill holes in the top of the rubber hose for your rigging needles.

Capt. Jeff Wilson
Freeport, Texas

CLEANER RINGS

I recently modified the stainless rings on our outrigger halyards that my bridge teasers run through. To deal with line twist in the monofilament halyard line, you must use high-quality ball-bearing swivels or snap swivels on both sides of the rings. In the past, I've used snap swivels crimped onto the halyard or had plain swivels crimped

TIP OF THE MONTH

Win These **Hobie Polarized's Mojo Sunglasses**! Send us an original tip and a photo or illustration of that tip, and if we use it, we'll send you a pair of Hobie Polarized's Mojo sunglasses. Protecting you from the elements and harmful UV rays, the Mojo frame features a sport-wrap frame and "fast-back" temple, as well as a signature paddle-inspired design and integrated hinges to cut back on frame weight. Check them out at hobiepolarized.com. Enter by emailing your tips to tips@marlinmag.com, or you can mail them to us at Marlin Magazine, Tips & Techniques, 460 N. Orlando Ave., Suite 200, Winter Park, FL 32789.





in line and then crimped again to the ring with another short piece of mono. However, this method means that you have to use three crimps on each side; with either the snaps or plain swivels, that's something extra that lines could hang up on or get wrapped around. To get the sleekest ring setup possible, I held the ring in a vise and cut it open with a hacksaw. Then I slid my swivels onto the ring and had the ring rewelded.

Now, I have a cleaner, sleeker halyard line with just two crimps holding my ring in place.

Capt. Randy Baker
Destin, Florida

EASY-DOES-IT HALYARD REPLACEMENT

Over time, your halyards will start to deteriorate from the effects of the sun and the wear and tear of going up and down through the pulleys and/or rings. You need to watch your halyard condition carefully; you don't want to have to restring them while fishing, and it is much easier to do the preventive maintenance at the dock. If you are just replacing the halyards midseason, or you think one is going to break soon, here's an easy way to string your halyards without bringing the outriggers down.

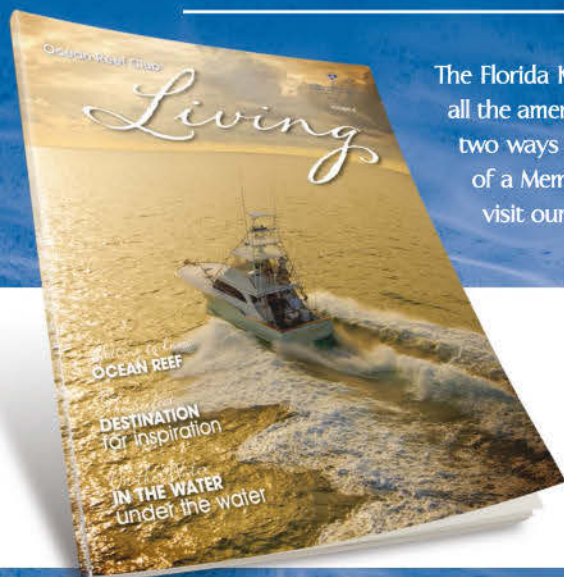
Cut the halyard you are going to replace, and attach the ends securely to something that won't let them fall off the riggers. Take your package of new halyard material and locate both ends in the package. Put a loop in the end toward the outer edge, and then poke a hole in the



center of the package. Pull the end that's in the center out of the package, and then secure it to one end of the halyard you are going to replace, using some waxed thread and a series of half hitches. Make sure it is tight and secure; you don't want it to come apart as it goes through the eyes on the outrigger. Now, pull on the other end of the old halyard, and it will bring the new line with it. Your feet never have to leave the deck, and once you re-secure the halyard, you are ready to go.

Capt. Stan Blackman
Destin, Florida

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SHIP'S SYSTEMS

BY KARL ANDERSON



Tender Options

LITTLE BOATS CAN HELP SAVE THE DAY WHEN THE BIG BOAT'S TIED TO THE DOCK

Carrying or towing a tender has become increasingly popular. It opens up endless opportunities to explore new territory and fish expansive areas inaccessible in the big boat, allowing you to take advantage of lousy weather. With the right equipment set up correctly, having a tender or two makes every trip more fun for everyone. I've watched a lot of sport-fishing crews fish themselves out of jobs over the years by grinding out the offshore deepwater fishing day after day, wearing their guests out. It's a shame, because opening up horizons that a shallow-water skiff or a center console offers, making the offbeat things available to guests, can fill up a trip and be a lot of fun. Entertainment and fun are key to longevity on the job.

Selecting the right skiff or center console and setting it up correctly with the right gear to tow, lift or cradle it on deck makes life easier — and more likely that these tools will be used. We've been carrying a skiff on deck for more than 15 years, and towing a center

console for nearly half of that. Having those tools has enriched our guests' experiences, and it absolutely enhanced our fishing. We have used both boats to catch fresh bait, scout, fish from, get supplies, snorkel, and go to dinner or lunch.

JOHN BROWNLEE

THE SELECTION PROCESS

When selecting the right boat for the bow, many folks pick a rigid inflatable because it doesn't do damage when it hits the big boat. Rubber boats are one-dimensional. They are hard to get into when snorkeling, they have no livewells for transporting bait, they have a super high profile on the bow, they don't hold as many people or as much gear in the same footprint, and, in general, they look homely. So if your sole requirement is that you don't do damage when you hit the big boat, you need to learn how to drive.

We have found that a flats skiff is most versatile. It has fishing features built in, and it has a low profile on the bow. It opens up the entire world of inshore and shallow-water fishing opportunities that are available wherever the big boat goes.



“The most important factor for selecting a tender of any kind is weight. If anyone says weight doesn't matter, they have no idea what it's like to carry a boat on the bow.”

The most important factor for selecting a tender of any kind is weight. If anyone says weight doesn't matter, they really have no idea what it's like to carry a boat on the bow.

Some manufacturers publish weights that are optimistic at best. The only way to really know what a boat weighs is to weigh it yourself. The weight is critical because it affects what size davit and cradle are needed, what gauge lifting gear is needed and how the weight on the bow will affect the big boat. The big boat's foredeck might require a bit more structural reinforcement to support the added load as well.

MOUNTING AND TOWING

Once you've made your decision, mounting the boat needs to be planned and done correctly. The cradles should be form-fitting to the skiff's hull to help reduce movement in rough seas. Flat cradles allow the boat to shift, no matter how tight your tie-downs are. This

usually happens when you least need it to: when it's rough. The cradles need to be bolted to deck plates that are through-bolted on the deck with backing plates on the underside of the foredeck. The tie-down eyebolts also need to be secured with backing plates. This requires dropping the headliner to access the ceiling of the foredeck.

We use the flush-mount deck plates so that we can remove the cradles if we take the skiff off the boat and clear

the deck for an extended period. When selecting a davit, lifting capacity and where the stand pipe will fit inside the boat are the primary criteria; then it gets down to choosing self-contained or remote-mounted hydraulics, manual versus hydraulic rotation, price, and delivery dates.

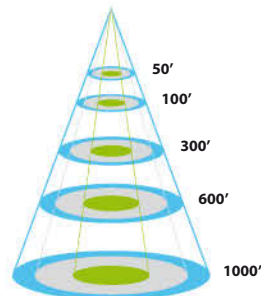
Towing a center console as a tender is a great way to keep folks entertained at your destination. A good center console offers room for several guests,



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Depth	Beam Diameter		
	PM111LM/LH 15° Beamwidth	PM111LHW 25° Beamwidth	PM411LMW 40° Beamwidth
50 ft	13 ft	22 ft	36 ft
100 ft	26 ft	44 ft	73 ft
300 ft	79 ft	130 ft	220 ft
600 ft	160 ft	270 ft	440 ft
1000 ft	260 ft	440 ft	730 ft





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Whether you're deck-loading a skiff (left) or towing a larger center console (above), proper rigging and planning will make the process go a lot smoother. Having top-quality equipment designed for the job will help prevent possibly catastrophic failures at sea.

as well as shade from a T-top, fish boxes, livewells, dry storage, sometimes a head, fishability, and easy in and out for diving and beaching. This is a great option for those who might not want to fish but can fill a day with sightseeing, inshore fishing, snorkeling, spearfishing, shelling — you name it. What we call “tropical tours” have saved many a trip.

Once you determine the size of the boat you would like to tow, you need to be sure you can tow it safely with the big boat. Be sure the cleats on the big boat are through-bolted with substantial backing plates to hold the stress and strain of the towed boat. Towing a boat puts many opposing forces on the big boat when it's rough. Knowing the limitations of the big boat is key to having a trouble-free tow.

Having the proper tow eye on the boat being towed is also very important. Most tow eyes have an eye through which you put the pin of a shackle, putting all the stress of the tow on that pin. I have seen plenty of bent

and mangled pins, some so badly they needed to be cut off to disconnect the shackle from the boat. We use a much better and easier on-the-tow setup with a tow bit that has a round stock stainless bar that is bent and welded to the hull plates. This bar allows the shackle from the tow line to swivel on the bar so that the pressure is equally distributed on the shackle and the tow bit when the boat digs or veers off, much like the links of a chain.

It is critical to use backing plates and through-bolts for the tow bit and be certain the stainless outer hull plates are large enough to distribute the loads across an area of the bow at or slightly above the waterline for the best tow. Having the tow bit too high can make the boat bow steer and pull hard when it needs to slide along with as little drag as possible behind the big boat.

TOW LINE

The tow line is not a piece of gear you want to skimp on. Insurance requires



Towing eyes (above left) should be mounted low and firmly secured with backing plates. Having a big center console to use on your trip (above center) greatly increases recreational opportunities. A black braided line aids in disconnecting the center-console boat from the tow boat. A 15-foot line helps pull in the 12-foot section of tow line that is fastened to the bow of the towed boat (above right).

that if you are going to tow, you need to have your tow line surveyed annually by an accredited marine surveyor. We had our tow line made by National Marine Supply in Fort Lauderdale, Florida. For the main line, we used a 12-strand plasma line, 5/8 inch by 100 feet, with soft eyes and chafe gear sewn on both ends. This line has a tensile strength of 51,400 pounds. The plasma line reduces stretch and decreases drag. From the boat, we have a pair of 60-foot lines made of 1 1/8-inch double-braid nylon, with a soft eye and chafe gear on one end that make a bridle to the main line with the tow boat ends whipped and left open for easier adjustment on board the tow boat.

To quickly disconnect from the tow line, we have a 12-foot piece of

We use 7/8-inch Crosby G-209A alloy galvanized shackles because they are stronger than stainless-steel shackles, with a weight-lifting limit of 9.5 tons. We carry spare shackles and pins for each connection in case one is dropped overboard when making the transfer. The pin is secured to the shackles with Monel wire so they do not unwind and vibrate loose in transit. We use Tigerflex hose as chafe gear where our harness lines come through the

transom hawse pipes to the cleats.

Having one or both tender setups will make a huge difference in your operation. The flexibility, opportunities and fun they can provide will keep your guests occupied and smiling when the fishing is slow, the weather is not cooperating or you have a big crowd with several agendas. Give it a try, and you might just find that tropical tours help you get to new and better fishing grounds. 🐟



“The tow line is not a piece of gear you want to skip on. Insurance requires that if you are going to tow, you need to have your tow line surveyed annually.”

the 5/8-inch plasma that serves as a connecting line to the boat, with an eye and shackle at each end. We leave it connected at the waterline tow eye and undo the shackle to the main line. The painter connecting line has a 15-foot length of 1/2-inch black double-braid to pull in the shackle at the connecting line/main line join so it can be disconnected and easily brought to the skiff.

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Vessel Security Options

PROTECTING YOUR BOAT FROM THEFT HAS NEVER BEEN EASIER

Marlin anglers are happiest when they're on their boats, and second happiest when they're not but at least know it is safe. Here are three devices we tested and found useful for keeping an eye on your boat's security.

GOST NT-EVOLUTION 2.0 SM/ WATCH HD

\$4,999, \$9,888/gostglobal.com

Service: \$36 monthly, \$30 monthly

Description: The satellite-based GOST (Global Ocean Security Technologies) NT-Evolution system (\$4,999) informs you of your boat's status at all times. Its Inmarsat M2M GPS monitors your boat's position and provides online 24/7 tracking. Set the geofence to include

only your slip, or your full marina should you wish to allow staff to move the boat for maintenance, fueling or pump-outs. A voltage sensor, a bilge water-level monitor and an entrapment sensor offer more protection. Should any of these triggers (or any of the many optional ones) be tripped, automatic email and text messages update you on the vessel's status. An IP67 water-resistant housing protects the system.

Optional GOST Cloak, upon illegal egress, completely fills the vessel with an opaque, odorless, residue-free smoke to drive intruders out. Our test system also featured GOST Watch HD (\$9,888) with two (of six max) security cameras that stream live from the vessel.

Our Experience: We assembled the components on a panel and powered them with a 12-volt jump-start battery for two to three hours. All the

components were given their electronic "handshake" at the factory, so our job was just to plug them into the system and turn it on. In addition, we needed to log on to the website to designate emergency contacts, set the geofence and set preferences for alarm sensitivity.

We received notification when the system powered up, and again when the battery was depleted. We were notified when a test hatch was opened and when our tester triggered the bilge float. When our boat drove away from home port, GOST tracked it in real time, so we could communicate with law enforcement on the vessel's whereabouts.

Eyeball cameras transmitted color video to our laptop via the website. When the FLIR M-Series camera is online, the owner can rotate the camera 360 degrees and 180 degrees up or down to inspect the vessel remotely.

All these features require a robust communication system, and that is a power gobbler. You need 12 or 24 volts, at about 6 amps, to keep the system functioning, making this best suited for long-range vessels.

Power Demands: 12 to 24 volts, requiring 6 amps

Geofence Test: It was easy to create the geofence and customize it to allow in-port operation for fueling or maintenance without deactivating it.

GPLINK

\$4,200/gplink.com

Service: \$1,500 annually, with concierge

Description: This security system's communications operate on cellular and satellite systems, opting for the cheaper connections when available. A concierge service helps monitor your vessel, following up on automated notifications in the most critical circumstances. The engine-monitoring system is most impressive, though we couldn't test it directly, lacking diesel power with digital communications ports. It communicates revolutions per minute, speed, fuel flow and many other engine-monitoring variables and fault codes in near real time

GOST Watch HD



GPLink security system

COURTESY GPLINK (TOP)

to the GPLink site for remote readout. Our test system monitored AC power and bilge-water levels. Entryway and motion sensors are among the many also available.

Our Experience: This was by far the easiest full security system to assemble and activate. We powered it with a paper-back-size Li-ion battery starter pack for two hours as we set off cross-country with the device activated below the coffin-box hatch of our boat. It clocked our progress in real time via cellular networks, beginning when we left our geofence.

When cellular connections failed in the more remote parts of southern Central Florida, it engaged satellite service to maintain full tracking until the battery died — and it sent us voltage warnings as voltage diminished. All these notifications and our position on a chart were visible on the GPLink tracking Web page. Each notification included a location link. Bilge-water levels used an electronic, not mechanical, float switch. A customized time delay can be set to allow bilge-water problems to self-correct. The AC power sensor is simply

plugged into any outlet. All sensors communicate with the system wirelessly.

Power Demands: 12 to 24 volts, low draw

Geofence Test: It was easy to establish the geofence and customize it to allow in-port operation for fueling or maintenance without deactivating it.

SPOT TRACE

\$99.99/findmespot.com/trace

Service Fees: \$99.99 to \$199.98 annually

Description: This satellite GPS receiver and communicator is the size of a Zippo lighter, so it can be hidden anywhere in the boat as long as only a layer of fiberglass or plastic comes between it and the stars. Its snap-on bracket can be glued or screwed in place. An accelerometer detects motion and notifies the owner via email or text message. Several contacts can be set. Notifications can be set at intervals of 1, 2.5, 5 or even more minutes.

When the asset stops, another message is sent. Standby battery times number into weeks; monitoring and reporting times are measured in hours and days. Hard wiring it to the battery



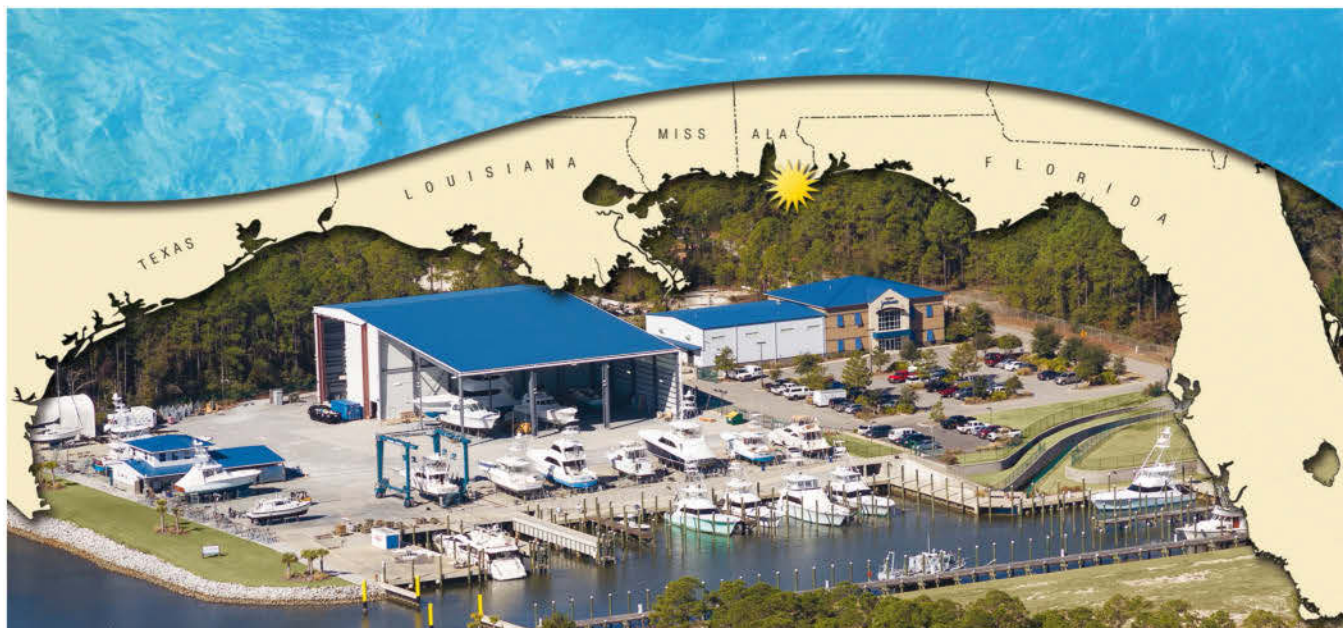
SPOT Trace
satellite GPS
receiver

makes more sense — if you can hide the power cable. Battery power will take over when external power is removed.

Our Experience: This was the easiest of all devices to set up and maintain, owing partly to its single-minded mission of telling you where your asset is. We put our test device in our boat, hitched up and immediately got a notification of motion. Then, our progress to the dentist, and finally, the office, was monitored and reported.

Power Demands: 12 volts or three AAA batteries

Geofence Test: Activates on motion, not geofence, but the unit often failed to notify us of the moment motion began, yet apprised us of changing locations. 🌐



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MARLIN *of* American Samoa

THIS MIGHT BE THE NEXT BEST PLACE IN ALL OF THE PACIFIC ISLANDS

By Sam Mossman



T

he islands of American Samoa could be considered the United States' stepping stone into the South Pacific. The five main islands in the group include Tutuila, Ta'u, Ofu, Olosega and Aunu'u. In total, they have a land area of 76 square miles. Tutuila (of which the town of Pago Pago, pronounced "pango pango," is the main center) contains about two-thirds of the total area and is home to 95 percent of the 65,000 islanders. It is believed that the original Polynesian explorers arrived around 3,000 years ago, and first contact with Europeans was with the Dutch in 1722.

American Samoa has been a territory of the United States since the signing of the Deed of Cession in 1900. The Pago Pago Harbor area was the site of a coaling station and a naval base that became of particular strategic importance to the United States during World War II, when roads, airstrips, docks and medical facilities were built. The government is an island version of the American political system. The executive branch is led by the governor and lieutenant governor; the legislative branch has an elected House of Representatives and Senate made up of village *matai*, or chiefs. The judicial branch is part of the U.S. judicial system, and American Samoa has a nonvoting representative elected to U.S. Congress. To confuse matters even more, only 40 nautical miles away is the independent island nation of Samoa, formally

known as Western Samoa.

American Samoa has a little of the feel of an unspoiled, undeveloped Hawaii: a veneer of Americanism overlaying a strong Polynesian culture, though with little Asian influence. Huge, U.S.-made pickups and all-terrain vehicles dominate the roads, and many of the local Samoans have an American accent.

The island of Tutuila is high and volcanic, with dramatic peaks, including Matafao Peak; North Pioa, also known as Rainmaker Mountain; and Mount Alava. The mountains tower over Pago Pago and an ancient caldera that forms a huge, deep, sheltered harbor that looks like it could house half the U.S. Navy's Pacific Fleet. The people live and farm on the narrow coastal fringes, while the rugged, mountainous central core is covered with unspoiled

rainforest. The coastline is a mix of volcanic rocky shore, coral reefs, and stunning white-sand beaches.

The standard of living is quite high, supported by U.S. federal money and the main industry of tuna canning. Though the infrastructure is well-developed, the tourism industry is in its infancy, although cruise-ship visits are increasing. Right-minded visitors might consider this a good thing because many aspects of these islands are unspoiled.

FISHING AMERICAN SAMOA

A large part of American Samoa's economy is underpinned by its tuna canneries,

which process commercial purse-seine and longline catches from all over the Pacific and supply a large percentage of the American mainland's canned tuna. Consequently, you might think that the pelagic fishery around the islands would be in bad shape, but you would be wrong. With a 50-nautical-mile exclusion zone around the islands for commercial boats longer than 15 meters (though this regulation has recently been challenged by commercial interests)

Huge schools of tuna provide excellent fishing opportunities, but they also attract marlin. Strong conservation laws help.



SAM MOSSMAN (3)



Samoa waters contain an incredible diversity of species, and fishing pressure remains relatively light.

and some excellent offshore structure, the recreational fishing must rank as some of the best in the Pacific islands in terms of sheer action. I discovered this during my first visit several years ago, a three-hour flight to the south from my home in New Zealand.

Charter boat skipper Andy Wearing collected me from my hotel in a huge, black Ford pickup and took me down to the harbor where the rest of his crew was waiting — Russ Cox (like Wearing, an expat New Zealander) and Samoan Samuelu Fuamatu. *Bonavista II* is a basic but practical charter boat, one of the few on the island. In fact, Pago Pago Marine Charters is about the only game in town. This was a day off for the crew, and everybody participated in the fishing. We were

soon heading out of massive and magnificent Pago Pago Harbor, passing by the handy structure of the Taema and Nafanua banks just offshore, beyond the local FAD, and heading for the South Bank, a big seamount 36 nautical miles offshore. Fuel is relatively cheap here, and we didn't hang around.

HOT TUNA BITE

The bank rises about 7,500 feet up to 300 feet, and we set a pattern of midsize skirted trolling lures. I soon found out why *Bonavista II* had two simple game chairs — a double strike of wahoo and dogtooth tuna was followed by a triple hookup of yellowfin.

The bite was a hot one, mostly yellowfin tuna. They were not big fish, up to 50 pounds. It was too early in

the season for the runs of big yellowfin, which can weigh up to 170 pounds, but the action was fast and furious, with mostly multiple hookups and the odd dogtooth tuna, big rainbow runner, and other pelagics thrown in. In the end, arm muscles were cramping up and people were standing back, trying to con others into pulling in the fish. You couldn't take it easy on the fish, though, because there were sharks around — I spent about half an hour

pulling in a big whaler that had been foul-hooked in the side after attacking a tuna. This vibrant ecosystem hosts all manner of predators.

We ended the day with about 25 fish on ice, the bulk of them yellowfin. Back at the dock, there was no shortage of friends and family happy to get some fresh fish. As mentioned, there is a wealth of offshore structure around Tutuila, and we explored more of it the next day. It was another early start, and this time I was doing a ride-along on *Bonavista II*, which was contesting the Pago Pago Game Fishing Club's Women's and Juniors' Tournament. It was pretty

Using heavier-than-normal tackle helps anglers wrestle fish away from the sharks that are prevalent in the area.





much the same crew as the day before, with the addition of our designated angler, Rose Talalotu. We headed 33 nautical miles offshore to a structure called the Two Percent Bank.

MARLIN ENCOUNTER

We found more life there, and we started with multiples of skipjack and the odd school of yellowfin jumping the big skirted lures. Talalotu dropped one reasonable fish after a good run, then was broken — or cut off — by a modest blue marlin that jumped about a dozen times after the line parted.

It was about then that I started to figure out a few things. In the Pacific islands — and American Samoa is no exception — fish is a prime resource, and the importance of the catch as food is just as great as the fun had by catching it. “Don’t play with your food,” I was jokingly told when it was thought I wasn’t

leaning hard enough on a fish.

Consequently, the Pago guys tend to chase prime eating fish, such as tuna, wahoo, mahimahi and the like, rather than billfish. In fact, some consider marlin a mildly annoying bycatch because they take so long to pull in, and are not such good eating as a nice tuna, wahoo or mahimahi. For example, I noticed we were trolling on

the relatively shallow tops of the banks, rather than along the drop-offs where big billfish are more likely to lurk. Even so, local anglers still hook plenty of blue marlin, along with the odd black and numerous sailfish, and they don’t seem to complain too much when they do.

EPIC BATTLE

After yet another quad of

yellowfin and skipjack tuna was dealt with, an 80-pound rig hammered down and the line screamed off. It had a more emphatic look to it, and I was not surprised to see another blue marlin take to the air. The fish carved up the surface about 200 yards out, jumping 15 times. Then the hard work started for Talalotu. The harness was a bit large for her, and she couldn’t get full pressure on the fish, but she slowly won back line. The fish stuck about 50 yards out and 60 feet down for quite some time, with Talalotu not gaining or losing line. She stuck at it calmly and gamely; a life jacket stuffed inside the back of the harness helped with the fit, allowing more pressure to be applied.

Finally, I suggested circling the fish with the boat to break



Rose Talalotu with the 200-pound blue marlin that won a local Pago Pago ladies’ and juniors’ tournament.

SAM MOSSMAN (2)



“I was not surprised to see another blue marlin take to the air. The fish carved up the surface about 200 yards out, jumping 15 times. Then the hard work started for Talalotu.”

its pattern. I don’t really like doing this; the changing line angle can pull a hook, but in this case, it worked. The fish popped up — a pretty, 200-pound blue — after a nearly two-hour fight. There

were line cuts in the tail and anal fins, so it might well have been wrapped in the leader at one stage. It was Talalotu’s first marlin; along with her largest yellowfin, it won most of the ladies’ prizes at the

tournament weigh-in later that afternoon. Every ounce of the marlin’s flesh was consumed by the local people, and Talalotu showed her blistered hands as a badge of honor for days afterward.

I had one more day on the water aboard *Bonavista II*, and while we knew we could find plenty of action on the offshore banks, we decided to try some other alternatives, trolling lures over the shelf edge at the east end of Tutuila. A dogtooth tuna was followed by a triple of yellowfin, then a wahoo. Traveling over more structure on the remote north side of

FURTHER INFORMATION

DIRECT AIRLINE SERVICES: Visitors to American Samoa can travel directly from Honolulu or Apia, Samoa, to the territory. Hawaiian Airlines offers two flights a week from Honolulu to Pago Pago on Monday and Friday nights throughout the year. During the peak seasons, Christmas and U.S. summer, a third flight is added to the weekly schedule.

INDIRECT AIRLINE SERVICES: Air New Zealand, Fiji Airways and Virgin Samoa offer a range of flights from New Zealand, Australia, Fiji and Hawaii into Apia, where visitors can then connect with Polynesian Airlines flights to Pago Pago.

ACCOMMODATIONS: The Sadie Thompson Inn and Sadie’s by the Sea, sadieshotels.com; the Tradewinds Hotel, tradewinds.as; the Turtle & Shark Lodge, turtleandshark.com; and a great many more. See americansamoa.travel for further listings.

EATING OUT: A must-visit on the island is Tisa’s Barefoot Bar, tisasbarefootbar.com, a quirky beach establishment in the best traditions of the Pacific and the home of the Tattoo Festival. Each Wednesday night, Tisa and her partner, Candyman, put on a traditional Samoan umu feast that is not to be missed. The food is delicious,

and Candyman mixes a mean cocktail! Reservations are required; email tisa@tisasbarefootbar.com.

CURRENCY: U.S. dollar. Credit cards are widely accepted.

ELECTRICITY: Standard U.S. plug configuration and 110 volts.

GETTING AROUND: Driving is on the right-hand side of the road, and vehicles tend to be large pickup trucks and ATVs. The speed limit is 20 mph (32 kph). If you want to drive yourself, 10 vehicle rental agencies are listed on the American Samoa Visitors Bureau’s website at americansamoa.travel. Taxis are readily available, and there are a lot of buses on Tutuila, but they run less frequently on weekends, especially Sunday. If you are not near a bus stop, just flag one down.

CHARTER BOATS: Tourism is still in its infancy in American Samoa, so don’t expect a fleet of air-conditioned battlewagons. There is really only one charter fishing operation in town: Pago Pago Marine Charters, pagopagomarinecharters.com. Its main charter boat is *Bonavista II*, a 40-foot aluminum flybridge cruiser, a no-nonsense fishing machine powered by twin Caterpillars. It has full safety gear, meeting both U.S. Coast Guard and local marine-patrol standards.

the island, I dropped a big diving minnow into the set of skirts, and the dogtooth tuna loved it; three more hit the deck in short order. Dogtooth tuna are a territorial reef species and smarten up quickly under pressure. When you are catching them on surface-trolled lures in the middle of the day, you know that a fishery has not had much pressure.

TOURNAMENT TIME

With local anglers preferring to catch tasty pelagic species like tuna and wahoo, to the extent of almost seeming to try and avoid billfish encounters, the question remained: Just how good is the marlin fishery in American Samoa? Certainly a lot of skipjack and small yellowfin attract billfish to the region, and there is plenty of exciting offshore structure by way of extensive seamounts and banks rising from very deep water. To answer the question, I returned to the island group to attend the big fishing event of the year, the I'a Lapo'a ("Big Fish") International Game Fishing Tournament, held in May and now in its 16th year. It is timed to follow hot on the heels of the International Billfish Tournament in nearby Western Samoa.

The I'a Lapo'a tournament is well-attended by local



anglers, New Zealanders (a number of whom ship large trailer boats up from New Zealand by freighter to fish the two tournaments, as it is only 40 miles by sea between the two countries) and Australians, with a small scattering of anglers from the United States. Typically, around a dozen to 20 boats contest the honors, with about two-thirds of the anglers being visitors.

Given that the local attitude favors table fish such as yellowfin, wahoo and mahimahi (masimasi in Samoa) above billfish, the tournament is weighted in this direction, with

tag-and-release marlin scoring a flat 200 points each and weighed fish accumulating a point per pound. The visiting anglers, mostly New Zealanders, tend to be much more interested in targeting marlin than the locals, but the strike-to-capture ratio is not great. I conducted a rough straw poll of skippers during the tournament I attended, and I figured a strike-to-capture ratio of only about 5-to-1. Obviously, the larger, more powerful fish tend to be among those that escape the smaller boats with amateur — albeit experienced — crews who might not be fishing the heavy tackle needed.

THE FISH ARE THERE

Certainly the big fish are there. Expat U.S. skipper Chris Donato, based across the channel in Samoa, targets marlin and uses 130-pound tackle. His best result to date is a 1,025-pound blue, caught in 2011. Before leaving home, I did a little research. The previous year's tournament catch report listed 25 blue marlin tagged and one weighed at 258 pounds, along with three sailfish tagged and a bunch of lesser fish (tuna, etc.) weighed, totaling 125 captures. You can't complain

The I'a Lapo'a International Game Fishing Tournament scores weighed fish on a point-per-pound basis.

about that among 12 boats and 55 anglers.

The year I attended, in 2012, 67 fish were weighed, including two blue marlin of 392 pounds and 306 pounds, with an additional 11 blues tagged and released for a total of 78 fish overall. The locals reckoned it was a slow fishing tournament.

This year, 104 captures total were reported. Of these, a black marlin of 286 pounds and two blues of 276 and 227 pounds were weighed, and an additional 13 blues were tagged and released, along with eight sailfish. (Visit the Pago Pago Game Fishing Association's website, ppgfa.com, for more tournament details.)

Given that most local boats don't really target billfish, the charter fleet consists of only one or two boats. A big percentage of the billfish that strike are dropped, so the modest results mentioned are a little misleading. I reckon American Samoa might have one of the best blue marlin fisheries in the Pacific, just waiting to be explored. 🐟



Local fishermen tend to prefer eating fish like this yellowfin tuna, and they might actually attempt to avoid billfish. Those who target marlin in the area report there are a lot of fish in these waters.

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PARADISE

IN THE

Perlas Islands

NEW OPPORTUNITIES AWAIT TO FISH
PANAMA'S FAMED PERLAS ISLANDS

By ANDREW COX



JESSICA HAYDAHL RICHARDSON



PANAMA

LAS PERLAS
ISLANDS

Named for their abundance of valuable pearls during the time of the Spanish conquistadors, the Perlas Islands continue to offer a different kind of treasure for anglers today.

A

S I DONNED AN INFLATABLE LIFE JACKET AND TOOK A SEAT IN THE HELICOPTER, MY EXCITEMENT WAS PARAMOUNT. IT WAS NOT ONLY MY FIRST RIDE IN A HELICOPTER, BUT MY FIRST TIME FISHING IN PANAMA. I WASN'T QUITE SURE WHAT THE ADVENTURE WOULD ENTAIL, BUT I LIKED IT NONETHELESS. TAKING OFF AMONG THE MANY HANGARS AT THE MARCOS A. GELABERT AIRPORT, JUST WEST OF THE CITY, I COULD SEE THE SKYLINE OF PANAMA CITY BREAK THROUGH THE LOW-LYING RAIN CLOUDS AS WE SLOWLY ASCENDED ABOVE THE HUSTLE AND BUSTLE. BANKING HARD TO THE RIGHT, WE COULD SEE THE PANAMA CANAL, AND OUT IN FRONT OF US WAS THE CALM PACIFIC WITH COUNTLESS CARGO SHIPS AWAITING THEIR TRANSIT THROUGH THE CANAL EN ROUTE TO THE ATLANTIC.



Hidden within a lush jungle on Isla Pedro Gonzalez, Pearl Island provides world-class amenities and spectacular views.

As the greenish-blue water turned to dark blue on our trip to Isla Pedro Gonzalez, now referred to primarily as Pearl Island, my thoughts were lost in fishing stories about the first anglers to fish these productive waters, including the one-armed, one-legged Louis Schmidt Jr., who caught the first grander ever recorded while fishing in the Perlas Islands, weighing 1,008 pounds. His father, Louis "Pop" Schmidt, worked for the Panama Canal Co. during the 1920s, and along with his brothers, Carl, John and Theodore, Louis Jr. began fishing the Perlas Islands and Piñas Bay in the 1930s. Having built two sport-fishing boats, *Caiman I* and *Caiman II*, the Schmidts became the pioneers of big-game fishing in Panama. Combine these facts with Guy Harvey's iconic photo of the estimated 1,200-plus-pound black marlin from Piñas Bay, and my thoughts were entirely consumed by what the next couple of days would bring.

Near in Proximity, Not Experience

Cruising at 1,200 feet, we began to see the outlines of several islands

in the distance. Only 40 miles from Panama City, the Perlas Islands make up this wonderful Pacific paradise. An archipelago comprising more than 200 individual islands, it was first discovered by the Spanish explorer Vasco Núñez de Balboa in 1513 and soon became the epicenter of the Pacific pearl trade, hence the name. During his first trip to the islands, it is said that Balboa's men collected 96 ounces of pearls in four days, leaving the local Indians confused about the explorer's fascination with pearls. Little did they know that the pearl craze would continue in Panama until the Japanese created an artificially cultured pearl in the early 1900s. By the 1940s, the cultured pearl controlled more than 75 percent of the market, causing the Panama pearl trade to falter, and leaving the islands largely untouched except by local fishermen.

Taking a sweeping loop around Isla Pedro Gonzalez, the home of the Pearl Island development, I marveled at the

color of the water contrasting against the rocky shore and the lushness of the jungle in which we would be spending the next three days. If someone told me we were entering the set of the recently released *Jurassic World* movie I would have believed him, seeing a large hawk and imagining it to be a pterodactyl. Upon arriving at the island's private airstrip, our helicopter was greeted by Pearl Island's Land Rover, and we were soon on a tour of the island. The first phase of Pearl Island development, which began in 2011, is set to open later this year, and its eloquent balance of high-quality amenities and maintenance of the natural beauty of the island is meritorious. In addition to private residences tucked along the hillside and on tracts sprinkled throughout the island, a Ritz Carlton Reserve, one of only three in the world, will be built to make this destination highly competitive among the top-tier sport-fishing destinations.

INDIAN ARTIFACTS ON ISLA PEDRO GONZALEZ

Originally called Isla Churcha by the Cueva tribe, Isla Pedro Gonzalez is rich in history that has only recently been uncovered thanks to a partnership with the Smithsonian Institute. Anthropologists recently discovered burial artifacts, human remains, pots, fishing taps, and many other unique artifacts dating back 500 years that give perspective to what life was like before the Spanish conquistadors conquered the local Indians. One of the most unique findings was a petroglyph found on a large boulder from the Neolithic era that lives on as the logo for Pearl Island.





Marlin are often the No. 1 prize for anglers visiting Panama (above), but if the fish don't cooperate, the *Ms B Haven* (left) provides the comforts of home and delectable cuisine for anglers to enjoy after a day on the water.

The Fleet Awaits

Looking out across the beautiful landscape from one of the high ridges, I spotted *Not Ms B Haven* cruising from the marina for an afternoon fishing trip. This 37-foot Strike is one of three boats that make up the Panama Yacht and Fishing Charters fleet. During our helicopter ride earlier in the day, we flew over the operation's 66-foot Buddy Davis *Cherin III*. I could hardly wait to spend a day aboard this beautifully maintained serious fishing machine that is equipped to chase marlin and sailfish, or spend an afternoon fishing for inshore

species. The final stop on our island tour was the world-class marina, where the 98-foot *Ms B Haven*, a Knight & Carver mothership, sat awaiting our arrival. As I was welcomed by the friendly staff, my thoughts were still consumed with the angling history this destination offered.

Fishing Grounds

Panama lies east to west rather than north to south, and acts like a net as the current pushes up from Colombia and hits the bottom contours, forming the Bay of Panama. "Upwellings bring nutrient-rich waters to the surface

and kick off an amazing food chain that leads to one of the world's best offshore fisheries," says Hennie Marais, general manager of Panama Yacht and Fishing Charters. The Bay of Panama stretches 120 miles east to west; the world-famous Tropic Star Lodge is located along the eastern side of the bay, and the Perlas Islands lie right in the middle. "Until recently there has not been the infrastructure to fish from the Perlas Islands, but with the new Pearl Island development and marina, there are now modern and luxurious facilities at the doorsteps to some of Panama's



best fishing grounds,” says Marais. “The prime fishing is 30 to 40 miles from the marina, and August and September have an amazing blue marlin bite when the currents and wind stack up artificial debris that become loaded with fish.”

In search of billfish on our first day of fishing, we headed to an area locally known as The Fingers, along the San Jose Bank, where the bottom contour changes quickly from less than 200 feet to over 2,000 feet. The week before our arrival, several local boats reported tons of life in the area as well as numerous billfish releases, including black marlin and sailfish. This is what we came to Panama for, and I was eager to deploy the spread. It was not long before we started

seeing signs of life as the water changed from a blue-green color to a darker hue, with porpoises, birds, bait on the surface and free-jumping sailfish all around us. About 10 miles from our target, we were welcomed by the familiar whiplike sound created by the line popping out of the clip on the right-long rigger as it came tight to the rod tip, followed by the sound of a screaming drag.

The fish was pulling line as our angler hustled into the chair, and our hopes were high as I looked in front of the boat to see yet another free-jumping sailfish. Clearing the right side of the spread as Capt. Jacko began to make his wide-sweeping turn to the left, I saw the green-and-yellow color of a mahimahi

Whether you are chasing pelagics offshore or roosterfish along the rocky shorelines, the *Cherin III*, a 66-foot Buddy Davis, is an ideal fishing platform.

jumping in the distance. Not our target species, but knowing the culinary prowess of the crew aboard *Ms B Haven*, I knew it would make a tasty treat that evening. Setting the spread back out, we continued to see signs of life all around us as we pressed onward to The Fingers. Unfortunately, the abundance of life reported from the week before had moved along, and after an hour of trolling around without a knockdown, we headed back to our previous location. Seeing several free-jumping sailfish, we switched over to ballyhoo baits on circle hooks, but the spread continued to go unnoticed.

Although the bite was not what we had hoped for, Marais commented, “I’ve seen 58 sailfish caught by the *Picaflor* in one day just 15 miles from the Perlas Islands. Whether you want to stop on the way home from offshore or make a full day of it, the inshore fishing for snapper, amberjack and roosterfish is also very good.” A weather system rolled in during our second day of fishing, and after giving an honest attempt at a nearby snapper hole, we tucked our tails between our legs and endured the sloppy ride back to the marina. Back within the calm water of the breakwater, my thoughts once again drifted to the potential of the offshore fishery, and I hoped that when I return to Panama’s Perlas Islands our luck will be different. The area’s rich history leads me to believe it will. 🍷

FUN FOR ALL

Back at the mothership, after a day’s fishing or bringing along family members who don’t want to fish, you don’t have to stay off the water for long. With two jet skis, several stand-up paddle boards and kayaks, a dinghy, and a flats boat, there is something for everyone to do or try. Being an adrenaline junkie, I of course opted for the jet ski and was pleasantly surprised at the viscera-flooring acceleration and speed when I took it around the island to explore the rocky shoreline and white-sand beaches. Others on the trip opted for the SUPs; the breakwater at the mouth of the cove creates an ideal place to learn to paddle, even if the wind is blowing. In addition to the above-water activities, *Ms B Haven* is fully loaded with snorkel and scuba equipment should you wish to explore some of the nearby reefs and rock structures.

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BY JOHN BROWNLEE

A DIFFERENT KIND OF TOURNAMENT

**Casa Vieja Lodge Finds an
Innovative Way to Help
a Local School**

RICHARD GIBSON



A

Anyone who has fished for billfish in Central America or Mexico knows the term *sancocho*. Mates, captains and other anglers gleefully shout this good-natured term of derision at you when you drop back a rigged ballyhoo to a sailfish or marlin, but miss the fish and reel in only the head of the bait on the hook. That's a *sancocho*.

We've all suffered through our share of these events, as a billfish escapes with a free meal at our expense. It usually happens when you hold on to the spool too long; knowing just when to drop the bait back makes all the difference, but if you let the fish grab the tail of the bait and then hesitate, you're on a one-way trip to *sancocho* city.

I've asked lots of captains and mates where the term came from, and I've never gotten a definitive answer. The etymology of the word remains unclear, but various Spanish dictionaries tell me that it means "stew" in English. Your guess is as good as mine as to why someone decided to call a ballyhoo head the word for stew, but someone did somewhere along the line. So be it. Suffice it to say that *sancochos* are to billfishing what strikeouts are to baseball.

A NEW APPROACH

Given this reality, the folks at Casa Vieja Lodge in Guatemala devised an exceedingly clever way to turn the dreaded *sancocho* into a positive thing. They put on the No *Sancocho* Sailfish Shootout tournament each spring, in which the boat captains tally up the *sancochos* for every angler aboard; at the end of the event, the anglers must pay the tournament \$20 for each *sancocho*. They even offer an "award" for the angler committing the most *sancochos*.

This event turns angler failure into a positive thing by taking the money raised from the

sancochos and donating it to the local primary school, Santa Cecilia, where many of the Casa Vieja staff send their children. The money raised by the tournament helps the school's staff afford critical improvements, such as running water and new classroom desks, an enormous boon to a school in need.

Casa Vieja Lodge owners David and Kristen Salazar understand the special nature of what they've created. "I've fished many tournaments around the world, but I've always had a love for the No *Sancocho* Sailfish Shootout," says David. "There's a pure, simple feeling to it, and that's why we brought it back for all to enjoy. It's a downright good time, and everyone relaxes and gets back down to the basics, how tournaments used to be."

"Sometimes there's more to fishing tournaments than the money, and that's why we love this tournament," adds Kristen. "It emphasizes fun, camaraderie and truly raising money, not winning money. The money raised from *sancochos* went to an elementary school with 200 children, including those of our mates and staff, where they don't even have running water. So while anglers have a blast, we are also able to provide a basic necessity to our local community, and, at the end of the day, that's what really makes a difference."

AVOIDING THE SANCOCHO

I attended the 2015 event with my wife, Poppy, and Yellowfin Yachts president Wylie Nagler. We added Casa Vieja's Herb Rosell to our team and fished the three-day event with Capt. Jason Brice aboard the classic Rybovich *Makaira*. Anticipation ran high on day one as we raised a sailfish right off the bat; Nagler successfully hooked it, fought it to boat-side and released it. Score: Team *Makaira* 1, fish zero, and no school money raised yet.

Rosell and Poppy each caught and released a fish in the next hour to keep our streak going, and then I got my shot. A sailfish popped up on the right long teaser, and as I dropped back, all I can remember thinking is: "Don't get the first

"Sometimes there's more to fishing tournaments than the money, and that's why we love this tournament. It emphasizes fun, camaraderie and truly raising money, not winning money."



The word *sancocho* could be a derivative of *salcocho*, a Spanish fish-head soup. In fishing, it means you got back only a head.



one, Brownlee.” Fortune smiled on me, and I successfully hooked the fish.

In most tournaments, radio chatter focuses primarily on the number of releases, and it did in this event as well. But, in addition to the talk of release numbers, reports on the building sancoco count filtered through. A couple of boats were having a hard time securing solid hookups, it seemed, and the count began to climb.

The crew aboard *Makaira* felt pretty cocky at the midmorning point because we had released five fish without a single sancoco, but then our luck seemed to turn. Rosell had the first one, executing a seemingly flawless drop-back and coming up empty-handed. As he reeled in his line, we saw that only a tiny bit of the ballyhoo remained on the hook, which led us into a spirited debate about what, exactly, defined a true sancoco. Did the entire head need to remain to qualify? If you got back a bare hook, did that trigger the forfeiture of a double sawbuck?

TOUGH SCORING

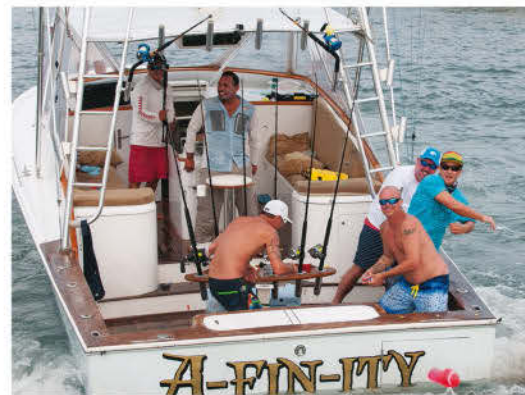
It was essentially a moot point because Brice marked down every missed fish with a wide grin, head or no head, and our sancoco count began. We proceeded to miss about five fish in a row after that; Poppy missed three straight, and whatever cockiness previously existed had

vanished. Other boats suffered the same fate, although a few were on a hot bite and enjoyed more success hooking fish.

The fish seemed to have lapsed into a state of malaise, rising to the baits or teasers in a half-hearted fashion and either fading away without biting at all, or mouthing the baits nonchalantly. For whatever reason, we settled into a bad streak. The middle of the day brought slow fishing, as is often the case, and our frustration grew as the fish that did rise behind our baits or teasers were not eager eaters. At the end of day one, we had baited 25 fish and caught only 10, although not all of the misses were sancochos. Humility had returned to the crew, and we vowed to produce a better effort

Pacific sailfish (above) are experts at removing a ballyhoo from a hook, and every angler eventually commits a sancoco. That's why it's a good idea to bring along plenty of rigged baits every time you go offshore (below).





The sailfish to the left did not cost the team \$20; it failed to deliver a sancoco. Team *A-Fin-ity* attacks during an intense water-balloon battle (above), a daily ritual when entering and leaving the marina.

in the subsequent days.

One of the most interesting facets of the No Sancoco Sailfish Shootout involves the tournament rules. In addition to the usual boilerplate tournament rhetoric and the \$20-per-sancoco rule, this tournament had a few unique entries in its rules document. One concerned water-balloon fights, which are sanctioned and encouraged between boats. This made for some interesting encounters on the way in and out of the marina (and occasionally offshore when two boats passed each other) as groups of middle-age men gleefully regressed into packs of junior high-school students away at summer camp.

In the interest of full disclosure, I'll admit that I was right there in the middle of it and it was a hell of a lot of fun. The one rule concerning the water-balloon bombardments stated that no such fights could occur at the dock. That rule was widely ignored after the first day. Engagements were close quarters and, at times, hand to hand. It really got interesting when a few of the crews began filling the balloons with mayonnaise instead of water. If you've never seen a balloon filled with mayo explode upon contact with a tower leg, you should. It's a sight to behold.

NO GOATS

The other fascinating rule stated that placing live animals aboard another boat was strictly prohibited. As it had never occurred to me to do so, I had to find out where this particular rule came from. Rosell informed us that in a previous tournament, an unnamed crew had locked a live goat in the head of a competing boat one night. An unsuspecting angler had a rude awakening the next morning when he went to use the facilities and encountered one extremely irritated and unhappy goat. Time for a new rule.

Over the course of the next two days, our hookup ratio improved aboard *Makaira*, though our sancoco count did rise steadily. At one point, we began discussing the possibility of the school

naming an entire new wing after us since we were going to end up donating so much to the cause. Each evening, the staff of Casa Vieja threw elaborate parties with awesome food. At these gatherings, the conversation was as much about each crew's sancoco tally as it was about the great fishing we were all experiencing.

On the final day, we had the best conversion rate from bites to hookups, but we still tallied a few sancochos. There was a lot of talk about the lack of commitment on the part of the fish, given the lackadaisical bites going on at times, but in reality, we raised a lot of fish and simply failed to catch as many as we probably should have. And after all, we knew it was for a good cause; perhaps, in this isolated case, failure had an upside. I can tell you unequivocally that there was actually a fair amount of competition to see who might actually end up with the most sancochos.

GOOD RESULTS

In the three days of the tournament, seven boats released 217 sailfish and one striped marlin, and the anglers racked up a whopping 222 sancochos for a total of \$4,440 raised for the Santa Cecilia school. But the raising of funds didn't stop there. A team from Cummins fished the tournament, and prior to the tournament kickoff, Dave Crompton, president of Cummins Engines Business Unit, announced that the company would match the dollar amount of total sancochos. "One of Cummins' main priorities is to invest in the communities in which we live and work," Crompton said. "It's a big part of who we are and what we do."

So Cummins threw in an additional \$4,440, and then Club Nautico de Guatemala matched its own personal sancochos, raising the total donation for the school to an even \$10,000. That's a pretty amazing display of generosity — and a huge boost for the school.

Capt. Brad Phillips won the tournament aboard *Decisive*, his 40-foot Gamefisherman, with 45 sailfish releases and 21 sancochos. In second place, the team from *A-Fin-Ity*, led by Capt. Chico Alvarenga, released 43 sails with 28 sancochos, and Capt. Chris Sheeder placed third aboard *Rum Line*, with 28 sailfish releases plus one striped marlin and 41 sancochos.

Angler David Coto, fishing aboard *Rum Line*, achieved the dubious distinction of having the most sancochos overall, with 16, but he took it all

in stride and cheerfully pitched in his \$320 to the kitty just like everyone else. Poppy ended up taking home the Top Lady Angler prize for releasing 10 sails.

HAPPY ENDING

I'm happy to report that no one found any goats or other critters aboard any of the boats this year, and no permanent injuries arose from the water-balloon fights, although a few minor mishaps did occur. On the third and final day, I refrained from partici-

pating in the melee with the intent of photographing the battle, and if you thought having about \$7,000 worth of Nikon equipment in my hands might have spared me from the barrage, you'd be dead wrong. It made me a high-value target, if anything, but both my body and my camera emerged from the war intact.

The No Sancoco Sailfish Shootout has brought a fresh and exciting new wrinkle to the myriad of tournaments that go on around the world each and every weekend. The Casa Vieja staff should be congratulated for creating an event that combines a tremendous amount of fun, a high level of competition and a fundraising effort for a worthy cause. Throw in great people, parties and food, and you've got a top-shelf event that is unique in the sport-fishing world.

As for me, I'm already working on my drop-back in anticipation of next year's event. If I don't get better at it, they might break ground for the new Brownlee wing of the Santa Cecilia school next summer, but in reality, I can't think of a better way to spend my money. 🐟



“In the three days of the tournament, seven boats released 217 sailfish and one striped marlin, and the anglers racked up a whopping 222 sancochos for a total of \$4,440 raised for the Santa Cecilia school.”



Poppy Brownlee with one of her sancochos. Each missed fish raised badly needed funds for the local school, so no one complained much about them when they occurred.

► FOR MORE INFORMATION ON CASA VIEJA LODGE, LOG ONTO CASAVIEJALODGE.COM.

An aerial photograph of a tropical coastline. The top half of the image shows a deep blue sky with scattered white clouds. Below the sky is a vast expanse of turquoise water, which transitions into a white sandy beach. The bottom half of the image shows a lush green island with dense vegetation, surrounded by shallow, clear turquoise water. The overall scene is a beautiful representation of a tropical paradise.

PROVIDEN MARLIN

*THE TURKS AND
CAICOS ISLANDS
OFFER GREAT
BEACHES AND FOOD,
WITH WORLD-CLASS
MARLIN FISHING*

BY BILL BOYCE

TIAL



Great fishing lies offshore in Turks and Caicos, but onshore activities also are world class. Fine dining, great beaches and very friendly people await you.

For centuries, stories of jewels and treasures in the Caribbean attracted those brave enough to ply these waters in search of commerce. Things have settled somewhat since those days of glory, but one thing remains true: There are still jewels and treasures to be found. If you need proof, look no further than the Turks and Caicos Islands. To be sure, hundreds of iconic island paradises can be found in this corner of the world, but few rival the talcumlike sandy beaches, the barrier-reef environment that surrounds much of this island group, and the 60 square miles of pristine flats habitat that hold huge schools of uneducated bonefish.



Huge dolphin patrol the blue water offshore, but they are just one of many species you'll find while fishing here.

Landing at night in the capital of Providenciales (known locally as "Provo"), I knew not what to expect come morning light, but when my eyes focused on the Blue Haven IGY Marina surroundings, I discovered a plethora of megayachts that long ago found the happy medium between the prolific offshore fishing grounds and the world-class flats fishery just minutes away from their

dock slips. The fact that I met this many mothership operations in one marina told me I had stumbled on a well-kept secret. After a few dockside conversations, the reason for this congregation of such fishing wealth soon became apparent.

CLOSE BITE

The offshore drop-off is but five minutes from the Blue Haven Marina, and wahoo,

yellowfin tuna, dolphin, blue marlin and white marlin are just a few gallons of diesel past that. Located northwest of Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic, and east of the Bahamas, TCI sits in the middle of some well-documented and heavily traveled blue marlin migration routes.

Honestly, I can't believe it took me so long to discover TCI, but once I did, I found out why I will migrate here again to pursue the huge variety of sport fish that find comfort in the surrounding waters. It's a year-round fishery. The winter bite centers on wahoo, which are found not only in large numbers, but in sizable stature as well. The cooler waters are their comfort zone this time of year, and a healthy

dose of dolphin make these waters their winter range as well. With the onset of warmer water in April and May, yellowfin tuna, blackfin tuna and blue marlin move in, and they will be prevalent all through summer and into fall. November is the shut-off point, after which the offshore fishery reverts back into the winter cycle.

Just outside of the Blue Haven Marina sits the north wall, where the action can begin within minutes from the channel. We fished with Capt. Russ Kleppinger as our guest angler, aboard Delphine Hartshorn's 46-foot Bertram *Panopoly*, with Capt. Phillip "Flex" Williams at the helm. It was late April and a transitional period by all standards for these waters. With no promises of success but lots of enthusiasm for a great day on the water, we throttled eastward for an area known as the "humps."

FEEDING TUNA

A few miles from the waypoint, we spotted birds with tuna crashing under them, and a quick troll through had multiple hookups on schoolie-size yellowfin. Subsequent stops resulted in more of the same, a great omen. A 50-pound-class yellowfin was landed, and Kleppinger said fish close to 100 pounds are not unusual. Mixed in with the schooling yellowfin were oceanic skipjack, giving us all the impression that if a blue

SKINNY WATER ADVENTURES

Several mothership owners in the marina had flats skiffs on board and make their annual trip to TCI not for the offshore bite, but instead for the exceptional bonefish fishing found in TCI. After a few stories and some photo shares, I made the effort to take in some fly-fishing myself. Fishing with Capt. Ed Missick of Catch the Wave Charters, we raced over to East Caicos and ran up on schools holding hundreds of bones. Fishing the muds is a no-brainer, but the skilled angler will want to seek the bigger and smarter bonefish that hug the shoreline for the ultimate fly-fishing challenge. After catching a few dozen bonefish from 2 to 6 pounds on beaded flies, we tossed small, plastic single-tailed grubs at them with light spinning rods, and the bite was just as productive, making it a great way to spend a day with the wife or the kids if they ever want to catch their first bonefish.



marlin was in the vicinity, it would be here.

The activity died as quickly as it started, and either the bait that was prevalent dived into the depths or a blue marlin came up for a feeding opportunity. We headed to the humps and gave it a good portion of time to produce a result, but we kept thinking we should have

The summer marlin fishing for both blues and whites can be extraordinary off Provo. The blues are small but plentiful.

GETTING THERE

Getting to Turks and Caicos is never an issue, with many direct flights available from Miami, Charlotte, Dallas, New York, Newark, Boston, Philadelphia, Toronto, Montreal and London, on carriers including American Airlines, Delta, US Airways, Air Canada, JetBlue, United, WestJet, and British Airways.

Once there, enjoy island traditions, such as the weekly fish fry, live music, local crafts, and tons of great food and spirits. For fine dining, Le Bouchon, the Coco Bistro, Coyaba, and the Blue Haven Marina Restaurant offer great cuisine. If casual grinds are more in order, hit up Bugaloo's, Mango Reef, or Somewhere on the Beach for fun atmosphere and local island flavors.

given the tuna a chance to resurface. We kept our eyes peeled back at the western horizon with a tide coming off high. The bird life came

back online, and we raced for the action. As soon as we found ourselves surrounded by diving birds, three rods lit up. This time, one of our

fighting tunas was eaten by a sizable critter.

MYSTERY BITE

Thinking it was a large shark,



You don't need superheavy tackle here (below), though a big fish is always a possibility. Onshore accommodations are both plush and comfortable, with great marinas (right).



we didn't get too excited and figured the fight would be short-lived. Going 90 minutes into it, with no snapped line and a minimal 80-pound leader, our thoughts of a large shark started to shift toward a large blue sulking in the deep and not wanting to show itself. The game ended abruptly when we put the rod in a holder and tried to fashion a more comfortable fighting belt/harness system to go the distance with this fish. A rod failure set the mystery fish free, and our

hearts and our hopes were dashed in an instant.

Trolling back toward the inshore drop-off raised a blue marlin within minutes, and a 20-pound dolphin was stuck just minutes after that. With only a day on the water to test this blue-water fishery, I came away extremely impressed and made plans to return in peak season to

see what could transpire when the bite really gets established. Thinking we had a great day, our tails went quickly between our legs when the dock was filled with several huge wahoo landed by a visiting sport-fisher that makes an annual pilgrimage to the TCI area specifically to target these fish.

Hartshorn said that on her

best day in TCI, she released five blues, with another seven blues raised. Though the structure on the humps is hard to resist, off to the west lies the northwest corner, where lots of marlin, tuna, wahoo and mahi are known to congregate because the current keeps nutrient loads peaked with the constant upwelling found there. 🐟

GREAT LOCATION

With Turks and Caicos located 580 miles southeast of Miami, and 170 miles northwest of Puerto Plata, Dominican Republic, it is the perfect spot to pull in and sample the blue-water fishery on your trips traversing this area. The Blue Haven Marina is an IGY facility, and manager Adam Foster is well-equipped to help with any questions. The Blue Haven Resort offers great accommodations, with a gourmet supply store to restock the boat should food shortage be an issue.

The islands have several tournaments worthy of note, with the biggest being the Caicos Classic IGFA Billfish Release Tournament in July. A qualifying Offshore World Championship event, this three-day tournament offers great fishing and an opportunity to share these amazing islands with the family for a quality vacation opportunity. caicosclassic.tc

If golf, wine and wahoo are priorities in your life, the Wine Cellar Golf and Fishing Tournament at the end of March and beginning of April allows anglers to compete for daily jackpots, along with potentially great payouts for the biggest mahi and \$10,000 for the biggest wahoo. wcgft.net

What I found most appealing was the great attitude of the local people, the culture of the conch, and, of course, the unsurpassed look and feel of the bleached-white sand that gives TCI some of the most iconic beaches in the world. Should you be looking for a place for a family vacation with fewer crowds than other Caribbean destinations, make the effort to research the Turks and Caicos Islands and see if you find it as appealing as I did on my maiden voyage there.

TURKS AND CAICOS

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THE
FISH NINJA





HOT SHOTS

PHOTO BY JESSICA HAYDAHL RICHARDSON

The fishing off Isla Montuosa in Coiba, Panama, heats up in May, when the water color and clarity rival anywhere in the world. Usually getting one good shot a day, the crew aboard *The Hooker* caught this large black marlin while live-baiting with a bonito.



EXPANDED COLOR OPTIONS

Penn brought a whole new look to its line of tried-and-trusted International reels by introducing a new silver color. Previously only available as part of Penn's Custom Shop, the silver reels are constructed of the same high-strength, lightweight, aircraft-grade aluminum as their gold counterparts, and they are made in the same Philadelphia machining center in which Penn has constructed reels since 1932. The silver color will be available in 12 different models, from the 12VSXS to the 130VSXS. pennfishing.com



IMPENETRABLE PROTECTION

The new Pettit Protect with Mica Shield Technology is a heavy-duty, two-component epoxy coating that provides a durable barrier coating in both fresh and salt water. Unlike other companies that use ground mica, Pettit Protect incorporates slate mica into the epoxy resin to create an impenetrable structural barrier, and its high-solids formula allows for quick and easy application with fewer coats necessary to be effective. pettitpaint.com



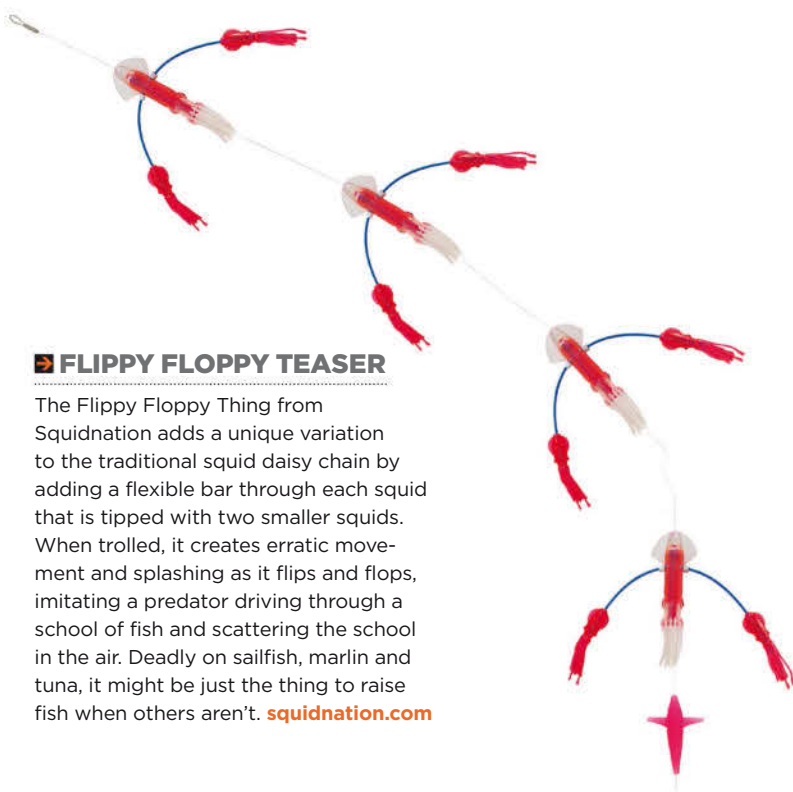
MUST-HAVE TIMEPIECE

TAG Heuer recently partnered with Kirk Freeport and Guy Harvey to introduce three limited-edition TAG Heuer Aquaracer Cayman Islands watches featuring Guy Harvey drawings. The men's version showcases a marlin illustration, and a sea turtle is found on the ladies' model, which is available with or without diamonds. Royalties from the watches go directly to the Guy Harvey Ocean Foundation to further scientific research and ocean education. kirkfreeport.net



CUSTOMIZED RIGGER STOPS

Custom rigger stops from Tournament Cable are available in nine colors and can be customized with your boat name and matching color scheme. Weighing in at less than 1 ounce, these high-quality, precision-made stops are sure to make your boat stand out, and they will withstand the test of weather and time. tournamentcable.com



FLIPPY FLOPPY TEASER

The Flippy Floppy Thing from Squidnation adds a unique variation to the traditional squid daisy chain by adding a flexible bar through each squid that is tipped with two smaller squids. When trolled, it creates erratic movement and splashing as it flips and flops, imitating a predator driving through a school of fish and scattering the school in the air. Deadly on sailfish, marlin and tuna, it might be just the thing to raise fish when others aren't. squidnation.com

SEEING IS BELIEVING

The new Luma-Vu Camera from Aqualuma provides an instant view of what lies beneath. Fitting into a standard Aqualuma 6 Series housing, the high-resolution camera connects to any onboard video input and comes with a scratch-resistant, injection-molded polymer housing. It features a Sony image sensor and a 3.6mm lens that creates a 92-degree viewing angle, so you won't miss what's going on underwater when a fish is in the spread or on the leader. aqualuma.com



EASY AERIAL FOOTAGE

Throw the new Lily overboard when backing down, and let the drone work its magic by taking the guesswork out of capturing awe-inspiring aerial footage of your next billfish release. The Lily flies itself based on your location and selected mode, using a tracking device and remote. With speeds up to 25 mph and a maximum altitude of 100 feet, it allows for incredible footage at your fingertips. lily.camera



Lines In Tournament Report



Rise Up took first place at the Orange Beach Billfish Classic with a 502.2-pound blue marlin in May.

THE SHOOTOUT

May 20-23, Abaco, Bahamas

The Shootout's fleet of 27 custom and production boats released a total of 52 billfish, including 21 blue marlin, 19 white marlin and 12 sailfish, during three days of fishing. *Wave Paver*, a 61-foot Garlington, showed its prowess by winning the overall Shootout title with two blue marlin, two white marlin and two sailfish releases — securing a win for the custom boats over the production boats in this inaugural event.

Wave Paver owner Junior Davis was named Top Angler, and the crew, consisting of Capt. Russell Sinclair, Jerry Owens, Garrett Van Orman and Brian Boyle, took home Top Crew accolades. Releasing one blue marlin each day of the tournament secured owner Scott Robins and Capt. Chris Zielinski of *Weez In The Keys* a second-place finish, and Walter Shikany's *Never Enough* took third with Capt. Trevor Cockle and crew releasing one blue marlin, four whites and a sailfish.

CAJUN CANYONS BILLFISH CLASSIC

June 1-5, Venice, Louisiana

The 11th annual Cajun Canyons Billfish Classic saw incredible fishing for the 46 boats competing for a total purse of \$593,100. On the first day alone, the fleet released a total of 23 blue marlin and four white marlin. On Friday, *Ono Ocean*, a 66-foot Ocean with angler/owner Palmer Long, grandson of Louisiana's 45th Gov. Earl Long, caught a 103-inch blue marlin that tipped the scales at 387.3 pounds. It was Long's 100th blue marlin caught in the Gulf of Mexico.

The tournament finished with 28 blue marlin and five white marlin releases, weighing seven blue marlin. In addition to those fish caught, an estimated 30 billfish were hooked and lost by the fleet. Capt. Robbie Doggett and angler Dale Artigue aboard *Relentless Pursuit* took first place in the blue marlin division, weighing a 508.1-pound fish. Second place went to angler Ransom Pipes, fishing with his dad, Randy Pipes, aboard *Pipe Dream*. They

Orange Beach Billfish Classic

ALABAMA TOURNAMENT DONATES \$36,000
TO THE BILLFISH FOUNDATION

May 13-17, Orange Beach, Alabama

Twenty-five teams competed in the 17th annual Orange Beach Billfish Classic, kicking off the fishing season in the Gulf, where boats had released a great number of blue marlin throughout winter and into spring. With anticipation high, it was *Rise Up*, a 56-foot Viking, that boated the 502.2-pound tournament-winning blue marlin. Rusty Skalla and his team also took third place in the release division.

Ono Ocean finished in second place, and *Iona Louise* rounded out the top three in the blue marlin division. The fish caught by *Iona Louise* had a very old Billfish Foundation tag in it, and scientists are trying to recover the historical data on the tattered tag. "I've never seen a tag that appeared to be in a fish as long as this one," said OBBC weighmaster Craig Marin. *You Never*

Know was awarded the Johnny Johnson Memorial Award for taking first place in the catch-and-release division with two blue marlin. *Just The Tip* released a blue marlin to finish second in catch-and-release.

At the awards breakfast, OBBC tournament director Kate Dorland and the tournament committee presented a check for \$36,000 to Ellen Peel and The Billfish Foundation for their continued work in the Gulf of Mexico. "This is why we put on this tournament," said Johnny Dorland. "All the proceeds from the OBBC are given to charity, and presenting that check at the end of the tournament is always the highlight of my weekend." The donation is \$11,000 more than the tournament's contribution in 2014, and is annually the largest donation from any billfish tournament to the organization.



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Lines In Tournament Report

caught a 454.7-pounder. Third-place blue marlin went to Dr. Chris Cenac's 421-pounder aboard *Rising Sons*.

Relentless Pursuit also claimed the top spot in the release division with four blue marlin releases, all caught by Dale Artigue. Second place in the release division went to Capt. Clayt James and owner John Engquist aboard *Chasin Tail*, based on time with three blue marlin releases. *Born2Run*, with Capt. Myles Colley and owner/angler Dana Foster, also released three blue marlin to claim third place. Winning both divisions, *Relentless Pursuit* was awarded the C.R. Bob Potter Memorial Trophy for the top boat, leaping to the top spot in the Gulf Coast Triple Crown Championship Series and receiving an invitation to the Offshore World Championship.

BIG ROCK BLUE MARLIN TOURNAMENT

June 5-13, Morehead City, North Carolina

Rolling off the production line only four days prior to the 57th annual Big

Rock Blue Marlin Tournament, *Viking 62* weighed a 680-pound blue marlin on the first day of the tournament, good enough to hold the lead for the entire week. Capt. Brian Komer and angler Earle Hall's catch won them \$560,500 of Big Rock's \$1,632,650 purse. Looking back at tournament history, their catch would have been big enough to win 26 of the past 30 Big Rock competitions.

Capt. Van Pierce and Eric Kimball aboard *EZ Boy* placed second overall and won the outboard division with their 556.3-pound blue marlin, and Capt. Will Ross aboard *Carly A*, with angler Adam Shack, caught a 504.3-pound blue to secure third place. Edged out of the top three, the crew aboard *Shenandoah* still walked away with a check for \$365,500 for winning the Fabulous Fisherman division with Robbie Stallings' 503.6-pound blue marlin, the first qualifying 500-pound blue marlin.

Prime Time, captained by Gray Hall, released two blue marlin to win the Level V release division; *Accordingly IV* placed second, and *Dancin' Outlaw* finished third. *Speculator*, captained by



Splashed just four days before, *Viking 62* won the Big Rock Blue Marlin Tournament with a 680-pounder.

Edward Murray, tallied more release points than any other boat in the tournament but did not elect to participate in Level V, only winning the Level I billfish release category. 🐟

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COURTESY BIG ROCK BLUE MARLIN TOURNAMENT

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Hatteras 45 Express

A NEW EXPRESS BOAT THAT CAN FISH OR CRUISE WITH EQUAL EFFECTIVENESS

With the Cabo Yachts brand getting absorbed into the fold at Hatteras, the folks at the headquarters of the storied brand from New Bern, North Carolina, had a great opportunity to increase model offerings, and the new Hatteras 45 Express Cruiser combines the best of both brands. A roomy helm deck, ample fishing room in the cockpit and a well-appointed belowdecks living area make this a desirable rig for owners wishing

to run their own boat with liveaboard capacity and the social aspects that express boats offer.

Hatteras offers the 45 Express in Cruiser and Sportfish configurations, as well as in two layouts: single-state and two-stateroom models. We tested the single version. This flexibility makes the boat appealing for those looking for that midsize express for living space, fishing room and a large helm deck where everyone is part of the action.

ACCOMMODATIONS

All the way forward, the master stateroom features a queen island berth, with storage beneath and above it along the outboard walls. A door aft and to starboard in the stateroom opens into the ample head, which contains a large vanity, designer fixtures, a shower and mirrored cabinets. You can also access the head from the main cabin without entering the master stateroom.

The salon area of the 45EX houses



the full galley, which is set to starboard, with good counter space, a big sink, storage cabinets above and below,

and a microwave and cooktop. Two refrigerator/freezer doors sit under a counter along the aft bulkhead of the salon area. A long bench along the port outboard has a good deal of storage underneath it. Moving up to the helm deck, the entrance to the belowdecks area is offset to starboard, making the helm area nice and uncluttered.

The 45EX has an integral molded hardtop and house sides, with large windows and an open bulkhead with clear drop-down curtains to enclose the helm deck. This rigid house creates an air-conditioned space without the leaks and temperature-regulation variances that typical express boats with canvas enclosures suffer from.

COMMAND STATION

The helm sits along the centerline with two helm chairs, single-lever controls and the engine user interfaces in easy view. The electronics screens lie within reach of the helmsman on their molded dash panel. The frameless windscreen provides good visibility forward from the helm, but the curtain configuration on the test boat limits visibility aft a little bit. A large cabinet with a counter-top, a refrigerator and heaps of storage underneath sit along the starboard side of the helm deck. To port, a large, L-shaped bench seat comes with a table and more storage.

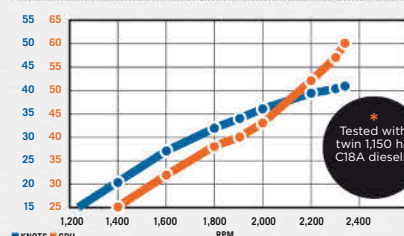
The cockpit on the 45EX comes with a complete sculpted mezzanine deck to port, with the entrance to the helm deck lying offset to starboard. Fully outboard to starboard, a storage cabinet contains an insulated drink box in the top. The mezzanine has storage beneath it and offers a great place to watch the baits on an offshore trolling day. Under the mezzanine deck to port lies an insulated

> SPECIFICATIONS

LOA:	44'7"
BEAM:	16'6"
DRAFT:	3'8"
DEADRISE:	16 degrees
DISP.:	(light) 43,200 lb.
FUEL:	800 gal.
WATER:	100 gal.
POWER:	Twin 715 hp C12A Caterpillars; Twin 1,150 hp C18A Caterpillars (optional)



> PERFORMANCE



CONTACT INFO: **HATTERAS YACHTS**
252-633-3101
hatterasyachts.com

box, and to starboard, a large storage bin sits under the deck. A molded armrest for the mezzanine seat has a drink holder along the inboard end of the seat.

Our test boat has fold-out seating under the gunwales that make the cockpit a great place to hang out after a day fishing. A 56-gallon combo fish box/

A centerline helm has single-lever controls and easily accessed systems. Raised helm chairs (below left) and a frameless windshield offer great visibility.





livewell with an observation panel window comes molded into the transom. Two large, deep fish boxes that double as storage lie in the cockpit sole. Lazarette access is along the centerline aft and opens up for good access to rudder ports and the aft bilge pumps and storage.

MECHANICAL SPACE

You get to the engine room through the helm-deck floor hatch. The C18A Caterpillars are nicely nested in the space. Things are a bit tight, but for a 45-footer, she offers good access

A helm-deck hatch provides access to the engine room, where there's ample space for all routine service tasks.

You can order the 45EX with one of two staterooms. The single-stateroom model, shown above, has a large galley.

to raw-water pumps, belts, filters and the like. The generator sits back under the mezzanine deck, where it might be tough to work on, but the basics, such as checking oil, should be easy. The electrical, plumbing and equipment layout and execution is clean and tight.

We ran the 45EX on a beautiful South Florida day with a 10-knot breeze out of the north and sunny skies. The 45 seemed quite nimble and maneuvered well, with her beam providing good separation of her props and rudders. She trolled clean at sailfish speeds and a quicker

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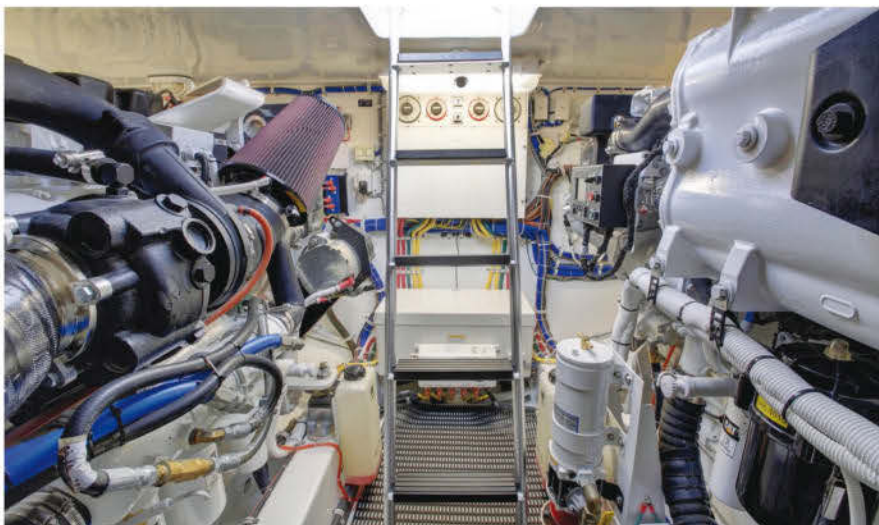
“She trolled clean at sailfish speeds and a quicker speed for lures, and she sat nicely for drifting or flying kites.”

speed for lures, and she sat nicely for drifting or flying kites. Pushing her up on plane caused little bow lift, and the horizon was not lost on acceleration. She gained speed quickly, making 20.2 knots at 1,400 rpm, burning a mere 25 gph.

TOP PERFORMANCE

Advancing the throttles to 1,600 rpm, she burned 32 gph at 26.9 knots, quite a gain in power and speed for not much more fuel per hour. A fast cruise of 2,000 rpm produces 35.9 knots at 43 gph, and on the pins, the 45EX turned 2,330, zipping along at an honest 40.5 knots while burning 60 gph.

The 45EX offers a good deal of amenities in a spacious midsize express. Her stylish looks, plush accommodations and noteworthy performance make her a candidate for the short list of anyone looking for an express capable of reaching the offshore fishing grounds, or a great liveaboard for weekendng. 🐟



HUK

PERFORMANCE FISHING



W W W . H U K G E A R . C O M





Winter 40 Express

A SPECIALIZED BOAT BUILT FOR A SPECIFIC TASK

You wouldn't expect to see a sport-fishing boat in the little railroad town of Apex, North Carolina, but the folks at Winter Custom Yachts have put the landlocked town on the map in the sport-fishing world. The rigs they build have quickly gained notoriety for their fishing prowess and a reputation for delivering what the owner wants. Owners Tim Winters and Will Copeland began building their Carolina-style boats in 2005, with a focus on

engineering, design and high quality.

The company has produced everything from a couple of 15-foot flats skiffs to outboard and inboard center-consoles, walkaround express models with conventional and pod drives, and full-on sport-fishing boats up to 64 feet. I hadn't had a chance to ride or fish on one until this test, so I was glad to get to Stuart, Florida, to check out one of the company's recent efforts, the 40-foot express *Morning Star III*, built for enthusiastic owners with plans to

fly-fish for billfish extensively.

ENGINE ROOM

Winter built the 40-foot express using cold-molded construction, and powered the boat with twin 435 hp Volvo Penta IPS 600 diesels. Her clean engine room came well laid out, given the amount of gear she was carrying. It can be accessed through a deck hatch, but the entire helm deck lifts up on rams for easy access to service and work on equipment. With the hatch



up, it's easy to reach the water pumps, through-hulls, the generator and the Seakeeper 5 gyro unit.

The Onan generator sits forward of the engines on the centerline, with the Seakeeper to starboard. Racor filters are mounted on the outboard wall forward of the engines and are very easily accessed. The pod drives are serviced and accessed from the machinery space tunnel under the cockpit deck.

ACCOMMODATIONS

You access the cabin from the helm deck, through a companionway entrance to port. The electrical distribution cabinet is well-marked and

The centered helm station offers good visibility, and the Volvo Penta IPS controls provide great maneuverability.

neatly done, and it's located within easy reach, just inside the entryway. Four steps down, the cabin opens up with plenty of headroom. Tucked under the helm deck, a bunk lies athwartships, and it also doubles as a huge storage area. Over the bunk, on the aft bulkhead wall, is a large flat-screen TV. Along the port side of the cabin, a bench seat has a removable table. The starboard aft side has open, vertical rod storage for easy and quick access.

Just forward of the rod storage, the head compartment has a full-size shower built in as an integral unit and painted out nicely for easy cleanup. A galley counter forward of the head entrance on the starboard side features a sunken cooktop, with a flush counter lid, next to a large sink. The bunk sits fully forward, with storage cabinets above it, leaving plenty of room to build in refrigerator and freezer drawers under the bunk. The interior features top-quality wood flooring and trim throughout.

COCKPIT

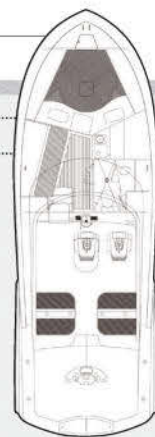
The cockpit features a transom livewell with a viewing window, and a tuna door to starboard. The area has a clean and uncluttered feel, with rolled-edge teak covering boards, and a teak deck. The owners had the rocket launcher rigged with a set of controls to accommodate their fly-fishing when short-handed.

Moving up onto the helm deck, there are mezzanine modular units on each side, with aft-facing seats with huge storage bins beneath them. The port seat has a built-in insulated box that can hold plenty of drinks and ice for long weekend trips. The starboard-side center storage bin is huge, and it's an ideal place for all kinds of things that

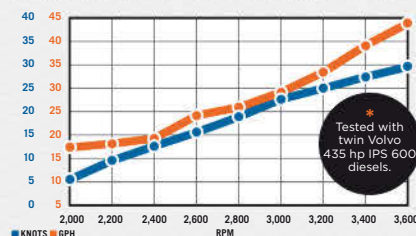


>SPECIFICATIONS

LOA:	40'1"
BEAM:	13'
DRAFT:	3'
FUEL:	540 gal.
WATER:	140 gal.
STD. POWER:	Twin Volvo 435 hp IPS 600 diesels



>PERFORMANCE



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need to be accessed regularly. Each unit also has slide-out drawers for even more storage capacity.

The boat has a centerline teak helm pod with single-lever controls, and the pod drive joystick controller is just to starboard of the helm. There are two helm chairs, with an excellent insulated cooler box into which the Eskimo ice maker dumps under the center chair. I like this; it can hold a lot and is centrally located and close to the drink box, making it easy to move ice around.



The entire bridge deck rises on rams for major service work access. A day hatch lets you easily check fluid levels.

The helm dash is clean and well laid out, with two 16-inch Garmin touch-screen multifunction units within easy reach and view of the skipper.

Two Icom M506 VHF radios came mounted to starboard on the dash, in front of the companion helm seat, along with controllers for the Fusion stereo, Seakeeper, Onan generator, and FLIR. The Volvo Penta engine ignition panel and engine gauges are placed under the controllers, and the engine gauges can also be displayed on the Garmin



“She is quite agile, spins willingly and backs around in both directions, and can surely come back faster than most anglers can gain line.”

screens. There also are molded-in drink holders and air-conditioning vents on the dash.

HELM STATION

The center helm offered good visibility as we pushed the throttles up and never lost sight of the horizon. The boat is very responsive and slips along easily on plane, answering helm turns and trim-tab adjustments with crispness. She really shines in close-quarters maneuvering and fish-handling ability. She is quite agile, spins willingly and backs around in both directions, and can surely come back faster than most anglers can gain line.

The *Morning Star III* has a solid, smooth feel, and although it was calm and we didn't put her seakeeping ability to the test, she has all the attributes of a good running boat. She also has good midrange qualities for travel; at a good cruise speed of 3,000 rpm, she makes 27.2 knots while burning 29 gph, and at a fast cruise of 3,200 rpm, she gives you 30 knots and burns 33 gph. On the pins, at 3,600 rpm, she zips along at 34.7 knots, burning 44 gph.

Without a doubt, Winter Custom Yachts has produced a fine product, with robust systems, excellent fit and finish, and performance to match. I like that it's building boats that others won't, boats that suit the owners' specific needs, as a custom boat should. 🍷



The spacious interior features rich wood trim and a well-planned layout. A double berth lies forward, with a small galley and a big-screen television as well.



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Ocean City, Maryland

WHITE MARLIN CENTRAL

For the offshore-afflicted, Ocean City, Maryland, is one of the truly top-notch destinations in the continental United States

For most of the year, Ocean City is a sleepy seaside community that's home to fewer than 10,000 residents, but the population can swell to over 300,000 once spring and summer roll around. Most come to enjoy the sun, sand and surf, as well as the attractions along the city's 3-mile-long boardwalk. But if you're a big-game angler, it's the

offshore fishing you're after.

Access to deep water wasn't always easy out of Ocean City, but a vicious August storm in 1933 cut a new channel from the Atlantic Ocean to Sinepuxent Bay, effectively severing Ocean City from Assateague Island to the south. The Army Corps of Engineers took advantage of the natural intervention and made the inlet permanent. With a new harbor and easy access to the cities of Baltimore, Washington, D.C., and others, Ocean City soon became one of the premier sport-fishing destinations on the East Coast.

Part of the allure of Ocean City comes from the hordes of white marlin that invade the offshore waters during the summer. Early pioneers racked up incredible numbers of these feisty billfish, and word quickly spread that

when the whites were thick as thieves, it was time to head out there and catch as many as you could. The creation of the White Marlin Open in 1974 further cemented the town's reputation as the "White Marlin Capital of the World." Since those early years, the tournament has grown in both size and stature, with several hundred boats competing for well over \$1 million in prize money every August.

Over the years the tournament has witnessed some incredible catches, including Maryland's first grander, a blue marlin weighing 1,062 pounds caught during the 2009 White Marlin Open by Robert Farris on *No Problem*. The tournament-record white marlin, a 99-pounder, came back in 1980 when Steve Bass reeled in the winner aboard *Top Hat*. The White Marlin Open is also one of the most spectator-friendly fishing events in the world, drawing thousands of curious onlookers eager for a glimpse of a winning fish. It truly



Top sport-fishing boats travel to Ocean City, Maryland, every year (above) to compete in the White Marlin Open (left).

COURTESY SWORDFISH SPORTFISHING / SWORDFISH-OBX.COM (TOP, OPPOSITE TOP), COURTESY HARRISON GROUP HOTELS / OCHDHOTELS.COM, COURTESY OCEAN CITY TOURISM (OPPOSITE BOTTOM)



is a sight to behold, and this year the White Marlin Open celebrates its 42nd anniversary, making it one of the longest-running billfish tournaments in the United States.

But whether you come for the tournament or just for a couple of days of offshore excitement, it's hard to beat the fishing out of Ocean City. The local charter fleet is on par with the best along the East Coast. When the bite is on, they're as dialed in as anyone. The usual spread built with natural-bait dredges and chin-weighted ballyhoo rigged with circle hooks for targeting white marlin will also catch just about anything that roams the offshore waters, including blue marlin, mahimahi, yellowfin and blackfin

tuna — and even a wahoo from time to time. But when the whites are in town, most boats will concentrate on targeting them and actively seek fish that are feeding on the surface and tailing down-sea with the swells. When using appropriately sized 20- to 30-pound tackle, white marlin are among the most acrobatic of the billfish species, not to mention the most beautiful. And it's not uncommon for a big blue marlin or oversize bigeye tuna to crash the party either.

The attractions don't end there, though. If a 60-mile run to the canyons is not in the cards, the inshore and bay fishing is very good and is a great alternative to a long run in questionable weather. Kids love the famed Ocean City Boardwalk,

Anglers anticipate the annual migration of white marlin past Ocean City, known as the "White Marlin Capital of the World."

with its multitude of attractions, arcades, shops and stands to explore. And since Ocean City is the ultimate tourist-friendly destination, there is a very wide range of accommodations available, from simple bungalows all the way to five-star luxury resorts. It's one of the best fishing hot spots in the world to bring the entire family, and there's plenty to see and do if they choose to stay ashore.

A final measure of a great destination is the talent it produces. Spend some time in just about any sport-fishing port from Oregon Inlet to Stuart, Florida, throughout the Caribbean or in the Pacific, and you're sure to find dedicated, professional captains and deckhands who proudly trace their fishing roots directly back to Ocean City. 🌊

GETTING THERE

ONE REASON FOR Ocean City's popularity is the relative ease to get there, either by flying or driving from the metropolitan centers of the East Coast. Three miles west of downtown Ocean City is the Ocean City Municipal Airport, which serves private planes and charter aircraft, but the nearby Salisbury-Ocean City Wicomico Regional Airport provides the closest commercial air service. There is only a single major north-south thoroughfare, Maryland Route 528, which is called the Coastal Highway. The town itself is very easy to navigate, but it can get quite congested in the summer, so remember that patience is indeed a virtue.

OCEAN CITY MARINAS

Ocean City is served by a number of excellent marinas. Sunset Marina (oc.sunsetmarina.com) in west Ocean City is home to a good part of the city's charter



fleet and has dry storage, fish cleaning, gas and diesel fuel, and direct access to deep water if you plan on bringing your own boat. Ocean City Fishing Center (ocfishing.com) is also a great destination for both charters and visiting boaters. Bahia Marina (bahiamarina.com) has charter and headboats as well as fuel and more. The aptly named White Marlin Marina (whitemarlinmarina.com) offers very convenient fuel, with more than three-quarters of the marina capable of in-slip refueling. It can also accommodate vessels up to 125 feet in length, as well as those with deep drafts.

OCEAN CITY BILLFISH TOURNAMENTS

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whitemarlinopen.com

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Aug. 13-15, 2015

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LABOR DAY WHITE MARLIN TOURNAMENT

Sept. 4-6, 2015

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ocmarlinclub.com

OCEAN CITY MARLIN CLUB CHALLENGE CUP

Sept. 18-19, 2015

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Below, left to right, 2nd Place Boat *Reel Pushy*, Top Manufacturer Mark Willis, and 3rd Place Boat *Sweet Thing*



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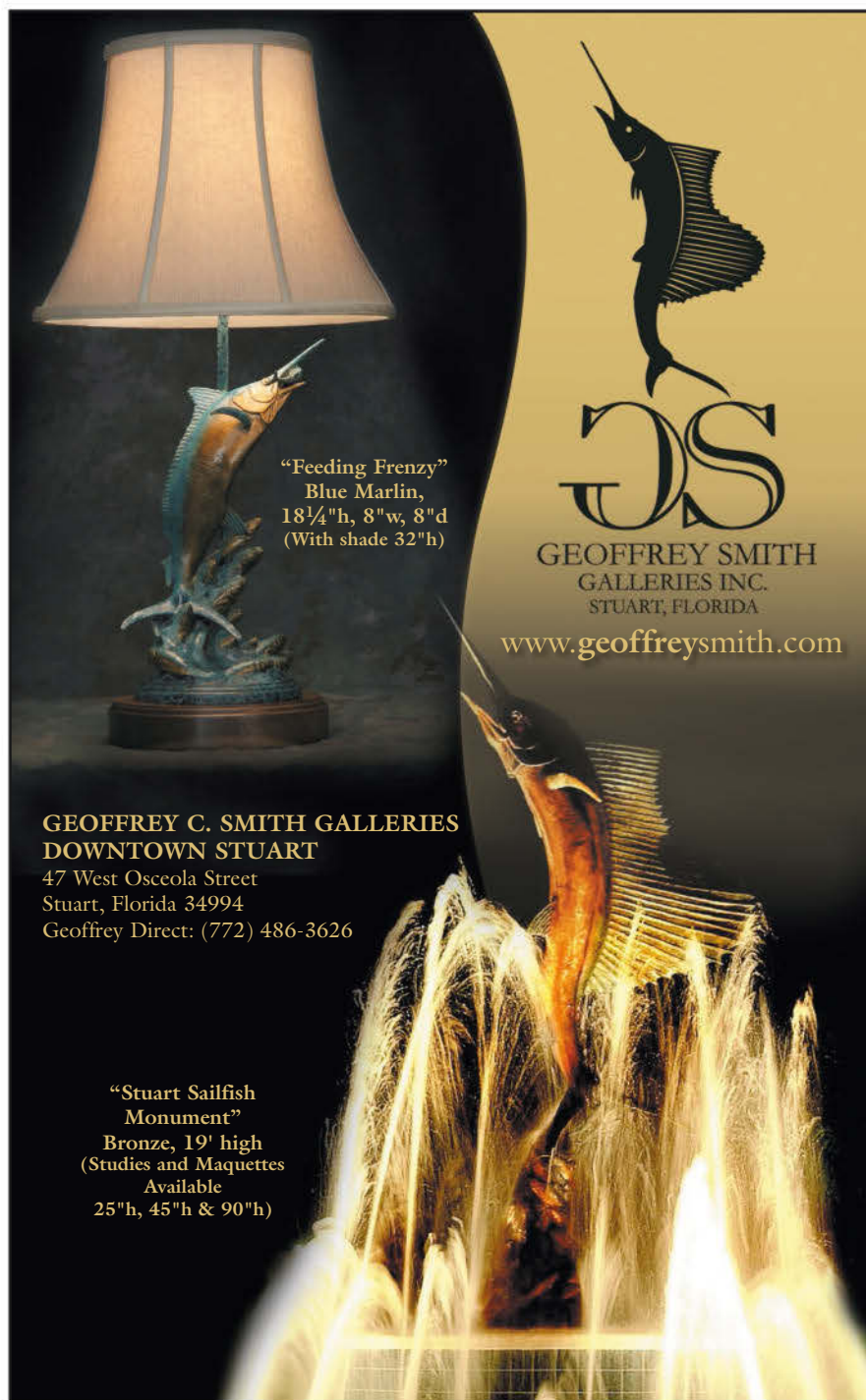
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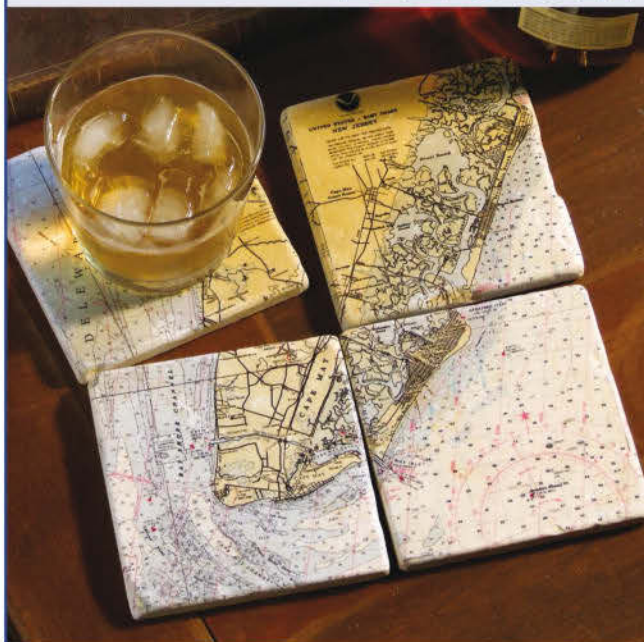
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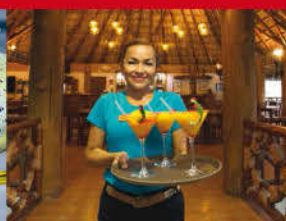
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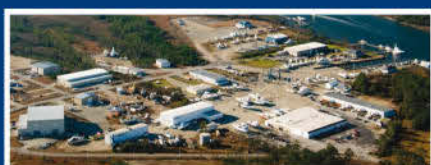
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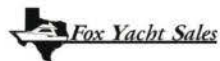


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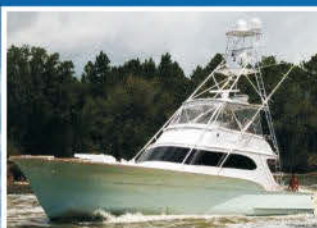


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My Favorite Fishing Spots

THE BAHAMAS AND AUSTRALIA'S GREAT BARRIER REEF

The question I get asked more often than any other is, “Where is your favorite fishing spot?” For most of my career, I have been in the entertainment business, helping anglers catch fish and have fun when fishing is decent. But we always try to have a backup plan for when conditions are poor. Even if fishing was slow, I could almost always make a fishing trip an enjoyable experience for my clients. Obviously, this was easier if the target species was available in good numbers and was willing to bite our baits or lures.

With all this in mind, I have to choose the Bahama Islands and the Great Barrier Reef of Australia as my choices for the all-time best recreational fishing spots on the planet. For me, they are the two most fun places to go sport fishing for big-game fish.

This is in no small part due to the weather. It is warm in both places, and it's rarely rough enough to be dangerous. In one area's spring season, which is fall in the other spot, three of my all-time favorite fish are often found in abundance: giant bluefin tuna and blue marlin in the Bahamas, and giant black marlin in Australia.

These species of fish can be found in other areas, but they lack the tropical reefs and the incredible fishing, snorkeling and diving. We could fill in the slow times that are bound to occur when chasing giant, highly migratory species with snorkeling, scuba diving and angling for numerous other species whose size, beauty and fighting ability when hooked would make anglers who spent their time chasing lesser species jealous of the fish we caught for bait.

If the trade winds did not blow at least 12 or 15 knots for several days in a row, marlin fishing in Cairns and giant tuna fishing in Bimini both slowed down. Black marlin and bluefin tuna both conserve energy by “tailing” down waves. That is what we call their behavior of body surfing on the waves that rise up when the wind blows in the right direction, setting up a decent chop on what would otherwise be calm water.

In good conditions, we could spot a big tuna or marlin from the tower, sometimes as far as several hundred yards away, and we could then maneuver the boat to let us present a bait to the giant fish without ever allowing it to see the boat or sense its presence. We prayed for wind, hopefully without rain or clouds that lessened our ability to see into the water.



“Nowhere on Earth is better than the Great Barrier Reef, but tuna time in Bimini or Cat runs a close second.”

The annual Cat Cay tuna tournament was the only competition I know of that was canceled if it was too calm! In slick, calm weather in the Bahamas, we might get lucky and catch a tuna by trolling blindly down the drop-off, but probably not. From Bimini or Cat Cay, we ran south looking for tuna. We could not expect the hordes of tuna that push northward along the drop-off when the wind blew, but we might find one or two, maybe even a small bunch.

If we felt there was even a slight chance of finding fish, we ran several miles south, maybe all the way to Orange Cay some 30 miles down the edge. There, I could put the engines into

neutral and drift north, all the time watching and hoping to see a tuna so we could get ahead of it — or them — to present a bait, and maybe even get a bite and possibly catch and release a tuna.

In the meantime, we could drop down lead-head jigs on heavy-duty spinning tackle and catch snapper, grouper, amberjack, barracuda, and king and cero mackerel. Some days we caught permit from giant schools hanging suspended just outside the drop-off on live crabs we kept in our livewell.

Another option was not to run so far south, but to stop and anchor, with a float tied to our anchor line, just south of the deep, dredged channel where ships came in to pick up loads of silica sand from what I first knew as Sandy Key, which became Ocean Key when mining started.

We could chum up yellowtail snapper both for their delicious fillets and for their use as live bait for the big groupers, amberjacks and sharks. At any time we might spot our main quarry from the tower and have a chance for a bite.

If the marlin bite turned on in Cairns in calm weather, it was more likely later in the day. We caught our bait early in the day, preferably, when big tidal flows from full- or new-moon tides concentrated the baitfish near the passes through the reef. The giant marlin bit better late in the day, even though our catch numbers were higher in choppy seas.

If it was so rough it was unsafe to fish outside the reef, we could spend mornings diving or snorkeling, deep-jigging, or we could throw giant popping plugs around enormous coral heads in calm water. “If the fish bite well, we will have all the action you can stand just fishing for marlin in the afternoon,” I told my clients. “If they don’t, you will probably want to quit early. Let’s do something behind the reef that is fun and go out after lunch.”

Nowhere on Earth is better than the Great Barrier Reef, but tuna time in Bimini or Cat runs a close second. 🐟



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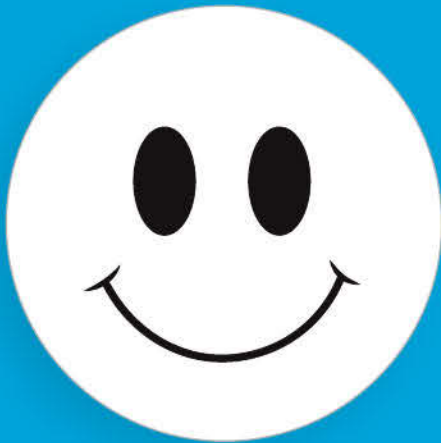
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